

# LOVAT DICKSON'S MAGAZINE

A MAGAZINE FOR THOUGHTFUL PEOPLE

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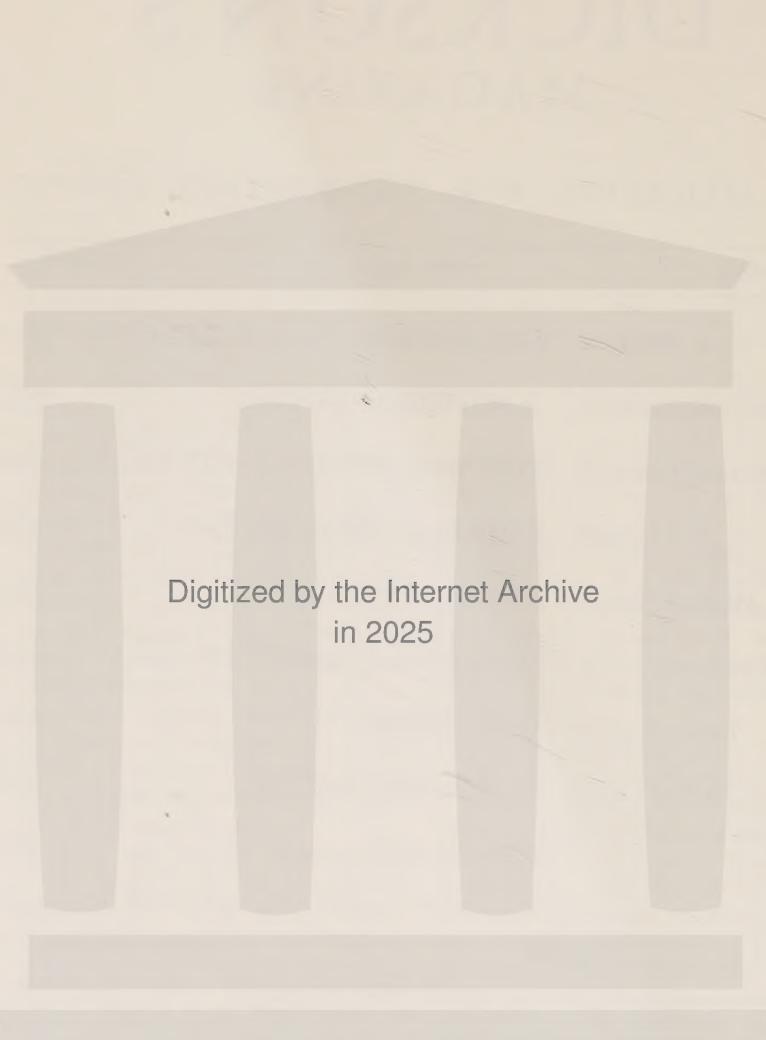
*Edited by L. A. G. STRONG*

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## L. A. G. Strong

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### V. S. Pritchett

THE publishers of *Lovat Dickson's Magazine* announce that Mr. L. A. G. STRONG is to be its new editor. A most gratifying decision to writers and connoisseurs of the short story! For at last their faith in this form has received recognition. The general celebrity of Mr. Strong as a short story writer was in itself a sign that public prejudice in exclusive favour of the novel and the machine-made stories of the popular magazines was declining; but this appointment carries the battle further. Short story writers have long been convinced—with the peculiar modesty of fanatics—that they knew better than anyone else the virtues and possibilities of the form. They knew that there is nothing more insipid than what may be called the bad “highbrow” short story; that it is fatal to publish anything short of the best, for the purpose of pleasing a shy public. The public is no longer shy, and Mr. Strong, as one in the first rank of living story-tellers, has special aptitudes for drawing the best from its hiding place. How pleasurable and how rare for an author to congratulate a publisher with fervour undisguised!

Mr. Strong is an interesting figure among contemporary writers, for he is one of the more difficult to place. He has many disguises. He confronts one with an unusual versatility.

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Is he really a novelist? Are his novels really a series of short stories strung together? A born story-teller, he very quickly mastered the art, and reputation came to him almost at once. But what is he? Where does he stand? And how does he stand? Are we to think of him as the poet of *Dublin Days*? Are we to think of an Irish writer or an English writer? On what levels does he write?

A writer like Mr. H. E. Bates can be dealt with easily. We know what he can do, we can almost predict his development. We see him standing sensitive, secure, and grave in his lyrical and classic acres. The tree grows, the tree is cut down. There are the vital, sap-sown shoots and the gnarled branches. Turning to other contemporaries we can define the conceits and fantasies of Mr. Coppard, the seen-in-a-train naturalism of Malachi Whittaker, the athletic intensity of Mr. O'Flaherty's god or devil-like Irishmen, the sauve, static shapes of Mr. Plomer's work. Many equally distinguished names might be added to this list, and we should know pretty well where we were with all of them—they have a singleness of direction.

This is far less true of Mr. Strong. He is one of those writers who are capable of many disguises. A personality of many elements, he has in one sense less to say than his contemporaries, but he has more to deal with and more to write about. Among serious novelists he is one of the few of any quality who is obviously an entertainer or story-teller. It is probable that he writes every day of his life. He is, in fact, what none of the foregoing novelists is, a professional writer.

No sooner has one said this and reflected upon those other professional writers, Mr. Hugh Walpole and Mr. Arnold Bennett, and particularly upon Mr. Strong's affinities with the former, than the statement seems only half true. Mr. Strong has so many selves. It will be useful, therefore, to pause and to try to disinter them. In a short biographical account of him-

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self Mr. Strong tells us that he is "three parts mixed Irish and one part West Country English". This, he notes, with a touch of professional astuteness, makes him "free of two distinct backgrounds", the English and the Irish. He goes on to say laconically, "work reflects mongrelism". The conflict between the English and the Irish in Mr. Strong is indeed crucial in his nature as a writer, though environment plays as heavy a part as race in the formation of a temperament.

His environment has been in the main English. Born in Devon, he spent most of his youth there, and during the War was at Oxford. For the past nine years he has spent the summer in the West Highlands. He went frequently to Ireland in his childhood, but one gathers that Ireland was chiefly a holiday country for him, an ideal land or Eden in which he could see the sources from which his life had been diverted. In his novel *The Garden* he evokes this lost paradise of childhood. The book is the expression of that nostalgia which is found in men of divided blood. Firstly it is Ireland which appeases; later, nostalgia has put on flesh and grown into a romantic passion for the West Highlands. I doubt if Mr. Strong has ever believed in a romantic Ireland. One is not romantic about those things which have tingled close to the sensibility of childhood.

Against this we have to place the preponderant weight of Devon and England. Devon also is a place of conventional romantic associations, and it is interesting to see how these react upon Mr. Strong in his first full-length novel, *Dewer Rides*. The book falls into two parts, and almost into two manners. The first part, as was to occur later in the Irish novel, *The Garden*, is the evocation of a childhood, the picture of the forming of a boy's sensibility. Then there is an abrupt break, and in the second part of the book the child is grown up and has become the hero of a romantic novel. He is

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by no means the conventional romantic hero—something of the original child and some streak of destructive passion is in him. The spirit of malevolence haunting old Dartmoor, a hint of crabbed medievalism, a suggestion of the demonic, a crazed clergyman who turns from religious ecstasy to sadism, the local “characters”, an eloquent stressing of the scene—these are all familiar romantic accessories. But the triumph of the literary romantic in Mr. Strong is not as simple as this. In spite of the discarding of Eric—who presumably was autobiographical, in the first part of the book—for Dick in the second part, the romance is presented in a voice whose whole tone is one of Puritan common sense. The effect has been less to let the sword fall with the full flash of tragedy, less to present an overwhelming accumulation of ironic circumstance, than to design a moral pattern. Since the treatment is vivid and extremely episodic, Mr. Strong’s intention does not really succeed. He gives the impression of one indulging himself in action, and of then trying to argue the effects away as if he could not intellectually face the consequences of his acts.

This is not an adequate examination of *Dewar Rides*, nor have I done justice to the extraordinary powers of characterization, invention, and descriptive writing which the book revealed. I have merely tried to trace to its point of origin a disconcerting characteristic of Mr. Strong’s attitude to experience which became more marked with the publication of *The Brothers*. This is the divergence between what Mr. Strong likes writing about and what he believes. How is one to bridge the gap between the scenes of violent physical action and the tone of moralizing Puritan common sense? The explanation would seem to be that it is into this common sense that Mr. Strong has retired from the irreconcilable conflict between his English and Irish strain. The sense of destiny, of singleness—even narrowness—of aim which is implicit in

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race has caused him to become, on the moral plane, a debating society in which all impulses are voiced, and a decision is made by a chairman who has carefully ignored all the arguments on both sides. It may be argued that if this diagnosis is correct it shows not the fusing of conflicting elements into a third compound thing, nor a flight from them, but a triumph of the English strain. I do not think so. There is something sensual in English common sense. Its roots go deep, it is steady and secure in itself; whereas Mr. Strong's sometimes looks like a moral opportunism, a shrewd way, neither completely realistic in the Irish fashion nor hypocritical in the English, of getting round the facts, of making a working arrangement which will keep off profound difficulties and give one breathing space.

This would be a serious criticism if Mr. Strong set up as a moral teacher. It also is a definite qualification of his profoundity as a serious modern novelist. It may be that we are unduly nervous on the subject of seriousness, and that Mr. Strong's stoical, working hypothesis is less sterile than a more thorough-going scepticism. Still, after reading one of Mr. Strong's sensitive and serious studies of boyhood or youth in *The English Captain*, *The Garden*, etc.—and it is a subject he treats surpassingly well—it is a little embarrassing to espy the sensible House Master with tendencies to muscular Christianity who must never on any account give himself away before the boys, and who is inclined to arrange a friendly meeting between the Almighty and oneself in the Head's study. The real interest of this attitude is its responsibility for Mr. Strong as a professional writer. His versatility, his cleverness, his adaptability, his knack of always being able to say something on all kinds of subjects and on all kinds of planes, spring from this attitude. Mr. Strong does this "talk writing" better than any novelist of his generation, and like the late Arnold Bennett he is able to divide himself into

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the serious artist and the man who can turn out what the Editors want.

Every writer worth his salt can do a certain amount of this. Turning to Mr. Strong the artist we discover that compromise vanishes. While the discontinuity which I have already mentioned is probably responsible for the episodic character of his books, it naturally does not affect him so much in his short stories. But whether in novel or story, he has a rich and genial humour, a quick ear for dialects, and a genuine insight into the interstices of rural "characters" who, in lesser hands, might be merely picturesque rustics faked for the pleasure of urban readers. Then he has—this is his finest quality—an excellent gift for presenting the animal in human beings. Very rarely the gross animal, but the passionate, athletic, rippling creature in men and women which laughs and leaps and loves and in demonic moments may break into thunderous rages or terrifying and exultant cruelties. Like all Irish writers he excels in these descriptions of physical man and of natural things. Fighting, swimming, fishing, rowing races, struggles at sea—such episodes can be found in all his books, and they are done with a clear economical vigour. In *The Brothers*, the scene of which is the West Highlands in the last century, he brought this particular power to a height both of description and inventiveness which I do not think he has surpassed. Mr. Strong was much blamed by the tenderer critics for the brutality of some of these episodes, but I am afraid that these are the people who would encourage his more dubious ethical reflections. The weakness of *The Brothers* was not in these scenes but in the slightness of the character drawing. But Mr. Strong had set out to write a romance of the Western violence, and in that he entirely succeeded.

To judge by his later work, and particularly by the novel

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*Corporal Tune* and a short story called *The Eddystone Light*, Mr. Strong had decided to abandon the romantic and the picturesque and that kind of poetic sensibility which found so perfect an expression in *The English Captain* for a grey and impressionistic realism. I doubt if this really satisfied his imaginative appetite, and I would much rather see Mr. Strong follow his romantic direction, making full use of his remarkable powers of invention and story-telling, facing the logic of the violent or exciting scenes which he writes so vividly, and passing from the common-sense attitude to human nature into a more complete surrender to it. His new novel indeed will show that he has returned to the scene of *The Brothers*. In that world and the Hardy-esque world of *Dewar Rides*, where Puritan and pagan strive together, his true inspiration lies.

# A Summer Visitor

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## Grigory Mikhailovitch

TOWARDS the end of August Dmitri Andreyevitch Kirilin, who had been spending a holiday in the country after taking his medical degree, decided to return to Moscow. It was a warm, peaceful evening when he drove to the country station to catch the night train. Curlews were calling monotonously from the long grass, and the slanting rays of the setting sun shone upon the pale leaves of the birch trees and poplars. Beside Kirilin was sitting his hostess, Anna Sergeyevna Leonoff, a good-looking young woman in a pink cotton dress and a large straw hat, whilst some distance behind them came another carriage with Leonoff himself and Kirilin's luggage. Both vehicles were travelling at a leisurely pace, as though there was plenty of time to spare, whilst behind each of them a little cloud of white dust rose a few feet into the still air and fell back again upon the road.

In order to break the awkward silence that had fallen, Kirilin, who was always confused when he found himself alone with a woman, coughed irresolutely and began to thank Anna Sergeyevna once more for her hospitality.

“In May,” he went on, “when I came to this district, I was a stranger to you and Ivan Petrovitch, and you had never even heard my name. And I, a poor student, had only intended to take lodgings at a few roubles a week, but you

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invited me to live in your house, put yourselves to trouble and expense, and did all you could to make me comfortable. And now we are all a little upset because I am going away."

When Kirilin had finished speaking, he sank into thought and forgot about his companion. He remembered the happy weeks he had spent at the Leonoff's, the picnics, the boating expeditions on the lake, the notes of Chopin's mazurkas floating through the french windows into the moonlit garden; and he felt heartache and regret at the thought that he must leave all these and return to Moscow, to his shabby lodgings with their uncomfortable furniture and the ugly paper upon the walls.

When he turned to Anna Sergeyevna again, he saw with dismay that she was weeping. Her shoulders quivered with sobs, and large tears, which she made no attempt to conceal, fell upon her knees and upon the floor of the carriage. Whenever Dmitri Andreyevitch saw a woman weeping he felt guilty and ashamed, as though he were to blame for it. The same feelings took hold of him now as he looked at Anna Sergeyevna's trembling shoulders, and, wishing to comfort her and stop her tears, the cause of which he could not understand, he grasped her hand and said:

"You ought to go away—to the Crimea, or somewhere. You need a change of air. As a medical man I advise it. Your nerves are unstrung, Anna Sergeyevna. Pardon me, but I have noticed it for some time. It often happens so—to a warm, enthusiastic nature like yours there is nothing so trying as a quiet life in the country." Anna Sergeyevna made no reply. She had turned her head away from him, so that it was impossible to see under the brim of her hat.

"She is angry," thought Kirilin. "Oh! these impressionable, over-refined natures!" And he felt sorry that he had spoken.

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For a long time there was silence. The sun had set, and evening was coming on rapidly. Far away on the left could be seen the roofs of some huts and a group of trees; this was the railway station. Occasionally a warm breeze overtook the vehicles, bent the the long grass of the steppe, and fled away with a sigh. From the carriage that was following them came the grumbling voice of Ivan Petrovitch, who had taken too much to drink at supper and was arguing with his driver.

“And what will you do in Moscow?” asked Anna Sergeyevna all of a sudden.

“I shall practise for a time, and then go abroad. I shall leave Russia.”

“You will leave Russia?” she echoed.

“I shall go abroad to study—to Paris, to Berlin. What hospitals and clinics they have in Germany! Beside them the biggest in Russia are like provincial hospitals; there is nothing more to be learned in them. Or I might go to the East—if war breaks out there I shall certainly go. There is nowhere like a battlefield for experience.”

“Then we are to lose you altogether?” asked Anna Sergeyevna, trying to force a casual tone into her voice.

“For five, or perhaps ten, years I shall be gone—who knows? But some day I shall return to Russia. I shall return with the experience of fresh fields of labour, new methods of treatment and diagnosis, almost a new brain. And by that time I shall be an obscure practitioner no longer. With a name and influence, I will reorganize the hospitals and the system of teaching, wipe away rotten prejudices and conventions. . . . The study of consumption is in an appalling condition; cancer is worse, whilst every year countless numbers die of cholera. And we are still without a really satisfactory anæsthetic. All these things must be investigated and improved.” Kirilin’s eyes flashed with enthusiasm, and he gesti-

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culated with his hands. "Yes, that is a great future, but it is not too much for one man to accomplish." He paused for a moment, and continued, "and then I should like to do something in psychology. The scientific study of mankind is inexhaustibly fascinating, and. . . . But you are quite pale, Anna Sergeyevna. Perhaps the heat has been too great for you. If you like, we will stop and I will ask Ivan Petrovitch to take you home." But Anna Sergeyevna seemed not to have heard his words, and, receiving no answer, he became confused and lapsed into silence.

It was nearly a month since Anna Sergeyevna had fallen in love with Kirilin. At first she had been impressed by his enthusiasm, his talents, and his boundless ambition, but her feelings had deepened rapidly, so that at last she felt happy and satisfied only in his presence. With agitation and rapture she waited for his return when he had gone fishing with her husband, listened to his voice and to his playing of the piano. And when she reflected that she had made no attempt to save herself, to resist this love, but instead had allowed it to carry her away without a struggle, like a warm and caressing stream, she felt ashamed and guilty. But, strangely enough, nobody had noticed anything, not even Kirilin himself or her husband. It had occurred to Anna Sergeyevna, a modest and wholesome woman, that even the servants, if they had suspected her secret, would have lost their respect for her and been openly rude, and that they would have been justified in their conduct; but her love for the young doctor, in which even Anna herself recognized something destructive and terrible, had not made the slightest change in her external life.

Sitting in the carriage, she remembered miserably that from the very first she had foreseen this day, when Kirilin would return to Moscow and her life would relapse again into mono-

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tony. But then it had seemed so far away, and she had deliberately closed her eyes to the thought and refused to allow it to spoil her happiness. But when the time had actually come for Dmitri Andreyevitch to leave, when she saw his trunks being carried out and lifted into the carriage, and it became obvious that in less than an hour he would be in the district no longer, and, perhaps, would never return, she was overcome with grief and despair, and insisted upon accompanying Kirilin and her husband to the station.

They were only a few miles now from the railway line: already tiny puffs of white smoke could be seen above the trees, whilst from the same direction there came the faint and melancholy whistle of a train. It seemed to Anna Sergeyevna that the train whistled so sadly because it knew of her unhappiness and the cause of it; perhaps it was the very train that was to carry Kirilin to Moscow. In imagination she traced its journey—over the dry, monotonous steppe, across rivers, by silvery birch woods and dark, forbidding forests. At the Kazansky station in Moscow Kirilin would take a droshky and drive to his lodgings, and there, in his bedroom, his study, that had been unoccupied the whole summer and probably smelled of damp, would pick up the thread of his life again and live it in his own way, poring over unintelligible and uninteresting volumes, interrogating patients, writing ceaselessly, never turning his gaze from the object of his whole existence—becoming an efficient surgeon and reorganizing hospitals. She found it impossible to believe that he could be contented in an atmosphere of disease, carbolic acid, ulcers; and, feeling as a little child feels towards the dry books read by its elders, she looked wonderingly at her companion's face, and then at the blue sky and the waving grass of the steppe.

It was the quiet, peaceful time that comes on summer

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evenings when the sun has just set. It seemed to Anna Sergeyevna that the whole world had ceased from its labour and was settling down to rest, and that the air itself was so still because it was resting too. From the side of the road there came the leisurely humming of grasshoppers, while high overhead a flight of rooks flew rapidly by, cawing exuberantly to one another. Afterwards, from the opposite direction and hurrying, as though it were afraid of being late, flew a great, solitary raven. It vanished with a croak behind the trees, and again the sky was deserted, save for the small, rosy clouds that sailed drowsily across it.

Anna Sergeyevna looked at the peaceful sky, and let her thoughts roam at will. She imagined how delightful it would be to be the wife of Kirilin and live with him for ever. . . . And in fancy she began to construct a programme of their life together. In the long, winter evenings she would act as his amanuensis and copy out his notes for lectures and for articles in the scientific magazines. When she stumbled and hesitated at the long and unpronounceable words, he would laugh and gently tease her. In the summer they would take a villa by the side of a lake, so vast that one could barely make out the trees on the opposite shore. Years ago, when she was a child, Anna Sergeyevna had lived by such a lake. They would pass the idle, sultry days of summer in rambling through the woods or boating on the lake. She fancied with what delight she would lie in the prow of a boat and watch Kirilin's face while he fished. And how loving and tender their thoughts would be at such times! Sometimes she would prepare a special meal for Kirilin with her own hands, and when he came home from the lake, hungry and exhausted, but blissfully happy, she would run her fingers playfully through his hair and beard. Then he would laugh, bend down, and kiss her on the neck. . . . Anna Sergeyevna came abruptly out of

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her reverie, startled at her own thoughts, and a little ashamed because she found them so pleasant.

In the carriage that was following them Ivan Petrovitch began to sing something in a husky tenor voice. For some reason the sound of her husband's voice oppressed Anna Sergeyevna and made her feel sad and guilty. Formerly, when she had first fallen in love with Kirilin, she had felt pity for her husband; because she no longer loved him and he was being deceived, but now, when Kirilin was being taken from her, everything that she had once found attractive in Ivan Petrovitch repelled her and filled her with distaste, above all his perpetual good-nature, which, she thought, was nothing better than vulgarity, and his husky voice, which, in the stillness of the evening, seemed to her affected and out of place.

"He only sings when he has been drinking," she thought.  
"How disgusting it is!"

When they reached the station it was already twilight. The carriage turned into the big, gloomy yard and stopped; a moment later Ivan Petrovitch drove up, too, and joined them. It turned out that there was half an hour to wait for the train, and so they all went on to the deserted platform, and, strolling up and down, looked at the red and green signal lights and the dimly shining metals of the railway. After a few minutes Ivan Petrovitch, excusing himself and grumbling at the heat, went to get a drink from the stationmaster.

Now that he had reached the station and had begun the return journey, the weeks that he had spent in the country already seemed to Kirilin far away and unreal, almost like a dream, and, filled with impatience to be in Moscow again, he began to think of his colleagues and of all the important and interesting work that awaited him there. In the meanwhile, night had come on; the soft velvety darkness, intimate and tender, was slowly enveloping the signals and the station

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buildings, as though it wished to embrace and caress them; whilst a little further away, where the open country began, heavy coils of white mist rolled over the fields and stole slyly through the trunks of the pine trees. It seemed to Anna Sergeyevna that these coils of mist knew of her secret and her agitation, and so did the pine trees and the winking signal lights along the line. And at the thought that the whole world might know of her love except the two men it concerned most closely, and that she, with one or two simple words, could destroy at a stroke their peace of mind and their indifference, she broke into a sudden laugh. "It's like a play," she thought, "or something out of a novel."

Pacing up and down with his hands in his pockets, Kirilin seemed to have forgotten her presence. And as Anna Sergeyevna walked beside him and looked through the darkness at the eager, good-natured expression of his face and his general appearance of a talented and unusual man, she felt loneliness of spirit and bitter, aching grief.

"It's hot," said Kirilin, waking at last from his reverie. "Perhaps we are going to have a storm." And he looked up searchingly at the sky, as though he expected something important to be written there.

"Perhaps we are," replied Anna Sergeyevna. "it is only to be expected in August." The tops of the trees stirred restlessly, so that it seemed that there might really be a storm approaching. Walking close beside Kirilin and gazing straight before her towards the horizon, where the last, faint traces of twilight were fading from the sky, Anna Sergeyevna began to speak in a rapid voice—nervously and with many pauses. Her heart thumped ponderously inside her breast, so loudly that she could plainly hear it; she fancied that Kirilin must hear it, too, and for some reason this made her feel ashamed.

"Dmitri Andreyevitch," she began, "it will seem strange

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to you . . . and unconventional . . . but perhaps we are saying good-bye for ever, and I . . . I must tell you something important."

Feeling his eyes upon her, she paused, tormented by a feeling that what she had uttered was unnecessary and shameful. And at the same time it seemed to her that with this uncompleted confession of love a definite period of her life had come to an end, that whatever happened now she would never live again as she had done hitherto; and this idea filled her with recklessness and elation, because her fate had been determined and the decision made at last. Radiant with love, she turned impulsively towards Kirilin; she would have spoken with passion and tenderness, would have told Dmitri Andreyevitch how long she had loved him in secret and begged him not to leave her. But at that moment a door opened, emitting a great beam of yellow light, and Ivan Petrovitch came out on to the platform. Humming softly under his breath, he came slowly towards them. He looked unusually tall and heavy in the gloom, and to Anna Sergeyevna he had never appeared so hateful as at that moment.

"A wonderful, enchanting night!" he began. "If Gogol, for instance, or Lermontoff were here now they would describe it. But you scientific men have no time, I suppose, for reading Gogol." He put one arm round Kirilin's shoulders and slipped the other one round Anna's waist, and thus, still humming softly to himself and exhaling a smell of vodka, walked with them along the platform. He felt languid and contented, and had a great desire to talk.

"A remarkable fellow, that stationmaster," he exclaimed all of a sudden, with a laugh. "In fact, a type out of Gogol. Two years ago there was a tremendous fuss here—he was short in some cash or other, and nearly lost his job. He is forty-eight years old, and is perpetually falling in love. On

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Sundays and holy days he sings in the choir; they couldn't get on without him. Yes, he is always in love, and tells one all about it, too, just like a child. An extraordinary character!"

Kirilin laughed at the susceptibility of the stationmaster, and Anna Sergeyevna, in spite of her unhappiness and the distaste she felt for her husband, laughed too.

"Tell me," said Ivan Petrovitch, after a pause. "What was the treatise you wrote for your degree?"

"On hypertrophy of the liver."

"Indeed! We had a landowner in this district who died of it—Pokrovsky. A remarkable coincidence! And perhaps you could have cured him. . . . A doctor—yes, it is a fine career. The Lord only knows what you may become in time." He halted impressively, paused, and asserted with enthusiasm, "A new age is dawning for us, my friends—an age when every journalist will be a Gogol and every district doctor a Pigoroff. He took Kirilin by the button and continued smilingly, "But there is one thing that you musn't neglect, Dmitri Andreyevitch. Science is all very well in its way, but you must hurry up and get married. You need the softening influence of a woman. Take Annushka and myself, for instance—an enchanting life . . . domestic felicity, and all that sort of thing."

Affected by the vodka he had drunk, Ivan Petrovitch talked on and on, without even caring whether they were listening to him, whilst every word sank into Anna Sergeyevna's soul like poison. The night deepened as he talked, and one by one the stars grew brighter and more numerous. In the distance, among the faint noises of the steppe, there sounded once more the plaintive whistle of a train; before long they could distinctly hear the rumbling of the wheels. Soon the lights of the engine twinkled among the trees at the bend, and then, with a last despairing shriek, the train drew into the

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station. . . . It seemed to Anna Sergeyevna in the most painful moment of all, when they were saying farewell, that she had lost the power of thinking intelligently, whilst only trivial and ridiculous thoughts came into her head, with images of Pigoroff, Gogol, and the amorous stationmaster.

But when the last bell rang and the train left the platform, she continued to gaze along the track long after the red light had disappeared, and for a long time she was unwilling to leave the station, as though it constituted the last link that joined her to Kirilin, which her going home would sever. The lamps on the platform shed a soft, dim radiance, the red signal lights glared ominously, and from either end of the station the shining metals crept a little way into the steppe and were swallowed up by the darkness. Beyond the yard the trees stirred restlessly as the breeze passed through them, and in the rustling of their branches there was expressed disappointment and despair.

A few minutes later Anna Sergeyevna and her husband were on the way home. As though with a feeling of relief, the carriage left the station and the brooding trees and began to jolt along the road through the open steppe. When they had gone a little way the moon began to rise. By its feeble light Anna Sergeyevna looked at the bent back and wrinkled neck of Yermolai, the driver, and at the placid, drowsy face of Ivan Pertovitch, who was huddled in a corner of the vehicle and was already fast asleep, and she began to think of the happy hours she had spent with Kirilin, the shadowy evenings in the garden, and the scent of damp grass and jasmine. She remembered how Kirilin had kissed her hand at parting, whilst he had thanked her once more for her kindness and begged her, for God's sake, not to remember ill of him, and involuntarily she rubbed the exact spot on her hand, as though she could feel it tingling. She remembered, too,

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how the mad but attractive idea had come into her head to jump into the carriage with Kirilin just as the train was going and accompany him to Moscow, and reflected unhappily that such easy solutions to one's problems are only met with in romantic fiction and not at all in real life, where the cruellest blows of fate are dealt without respite or mitigation.

"Nobody cares," she repeated miserably. "Nobody." And the thought that her unhappiness did not interest a single human being appeared to her strange and terrible. It seemed that she was condemned to live for an interminable number of years in this remote corner of Russia, until, perhaps, she had forgotten about Kirilin and the free, happy life of which in a moment of impulse and intoxication, she had dreamed. And every day would be a burden, every day she would be tormented by her husband's sleepy, vacant smile, by the cries of the lapwings and marmots in the steppe, by the same dusty roads, the same sheep, the same flock of birds that had passed her on the way to the station. It seemed as though fate had tantalized her cruelly, had made her an offer of love and happiness and, before she could put out her hand to take it, had snatched it away again for ever.

On the very edge of the horizon, where, perhaps, they had been lying in wait, some small, dark clouds appeared. Slowly, with an effort, they pursued the rising moon and began to roll ponderously across it, as though they were envious of it and wished to stifle it and put out its light. The sky grew dark. The rays of the carriage lamps danced and flickered on the uneven road, and cast huge, distorted shadows that raced along the grass. The damp of evening was rising from the steppe, and wisps of soft, white mist glimmered like phantoms in the darkness. In the corner next to Anna, Ivan Petrovitch stirred uneasily and, waking from his sleep, coughed and called to Yermolai to urge on the horses.

# The Man Who Did Not Pray

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Laurence Housman

NAHTI-POO, son of Kayrahmam the rope-maker, had been left motherless from his first year, to a bringing-up which was all his own. The hum of his father's wheel, as he lay below watching the spin of the loop which seemed never to end, had been his only cradle-song. Through the green shade of over-hanging boughs came tempered light; and the large gentle kine roving the village street stepped over but did not tread on him. As soon as he could crawl, he began to explore the world, and presently (when he got upon his feet) to adventure in it; and so long as Nahti-poo in his goings kept clear of the loop, his father, busy at making ends meet, left him benevolently alone and caused him no grief.

Twice a day they dipped fingers in the same bowl, and at night shared the same sleeping-mat under a common roof; and with this and that, the sum total of parental care, Nahti-poo's needs were satisfied and his mind content. All about the world he saw the wonderful beauty of things left to themselves, of sunlight and shade, of leaves that grew, and water that ran; of clouds adrift on the blue air; and of winds that slept and woke, yet had no form, and whose cause he could not discover. But things which moved were good to the eye, sounds good to the ear, fruit and grain good to the taste; the days were beautifully long, the nights were beautifully short;

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clay mixed with water made mud pies; curled leaves floated like boats upon the stream; thrown pebbles skimmed over it like wild geese; other children shared in his games—what more in the world could he want? For a long time life was so simple he never questioned it. But as time went on, sometimes alone, sometimes in company, applying its ways and means to further uses he formed habits, opinions, acquaintances, and so, presently, a mind of his own. Then with his mind he began to discover the meaning of things, and life became more interesting.

In the centre of the village stood the temple, guarded by an old priest; and every day, singly or in groups, or at times of festival all together in a crowd, the villagers went in the temple to pray. Sometimes, but not so often as others, Kayrahmam the rope-maker went too; and on high and special occasions he took Nahti-poo with him. Then Nahti-poo would behold his father arrayed in a long white robe, which at other times he never wore, and would hear his voice lifted in a high melancholy wail, the sorrowfulness of which caused his eyes to fill with tears. Inside the temple indeed, Kayrahmam the silent one became quite talkative, always repeating with the rest the same form of words; and meanwhile, from all alike, went such a swaying of heads, and bending of backs, and spreading abroad of palms, as never was seen at any other time.

“Father,” said Nahti-poo as they returned together from the temple one day, “What were you talking about in there?”

“I was praying,” said his father.

“What were you praying for?”

“The needful, my son; that without which a man would die, or live in misery.”

“But I have all that without praying for it,” said Nahti-poo; “and other things too.”

“One may not always have them,” replied his father as one

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who repeats a lesson; “ man must pray, lest want come suddenly and devour him. You also, being in need, will have to pray some day.”

But Nahti-poo was no longer paying attention. Things that he had not yet come to want did not concern him. He threw up his heels and ran; life, good and abundant, surrounded him. Stretching out both hands to sunlight and air, he clasped and unclasped them as he ran; yet were his hands still empty, and the world still full of them. This was a new discovery..

“ Why should I pray? ” thought Nahti-poo. “ I don’t want anything: everything is here.”

Suddenly he stopped. Down the street came the child of a rich man, led by his nurse, drawing upon a string a toy bullock-cart. It had coloured wheels and bells and silk tassels hanging from the yoke; and the bullocks were white with gilded horns; and the little wooden man who sat in the driver’s seat had a gold turban on his head, and underneath one could see the whites of his eyes.

Nahti-poo gazed with envy and astonishment; his soul became a thing of hunger. “ If I do not have that bullock-cart,” he said to himself, “ I shall die! ” So going up to the rich man’s child, he said, “ I want that bullock-cart; give it me! I am bigger than you, so mine is the bigger want.”

The child stared proudly, and the nurse looked down at him with angry contempt, but did not speak. Reaching up her foot she planted it firmly and well, and Nahti-poo was left sitting in the road, very weak and small and sorry for himself, but in no wise cured of his want. There was nothing in the world he so much wanted as that toy bullock-cart. Then he remembered his father’s word: want had come suddenly to devour him; he must pray. He went back to the temple; the door was still open, but the congregation had

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gone. This surely was the right time, for now he could pray, all alone, and the god, having no one else to listen to, could the better attend to his need; at another time chances might be against him.

Softly he approached the shrine; up there in the gloom sat the black stone image, and from the midst of the forehead, set like a jewel, the Eye of Heaven looked at him. Nahti-poo put up his hands and was about to begin his prayer—the first prayer he had ever prayed—when he heard quite near him a low sound of weeping; and there, crouched at the feet of the image he saw one whom he knew, a young woman of the village whose husband had died after they had been married only a few weeks. Though she choked and sobbed, Nahti-poo could hear plainly the words of her prayer, for many times over she repeated it, and always in the same words. “A son! O God, give me a son! That is all I ask, so that I may not have to live alone.” And as he heard, Nahti-poo drew back, for all at once he felt empty of purpose and ashamed. “Surely,” he said to himself, “her need is greater than mine; if I cause the Eye of Heaven to turn on me now, He may forget what she has been asking for. I will wait till her prayer has been answered, then I will come again.”

So Nahti-poo went out of the temple, not having prayed at all; and while he waited for the widow’s son to be born, his desire for the bullock-cart ceased to trouble him; other things came to fill his mind and brought content.

And so it was afterwards and always. Whenever he went into the temple to pray, he found others praying before him whose need seemed greater than his, and whose prayers though often made had not been granted. It was wonderful how many things people were in need of, and, though a thousand times disappointed, went on praying for. Nahti-poo began to notice how few of all the prayers he listened to found an answer.

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“It is because so many are praying,” he thought. “God has not time to answer them. If fewer prayed, more prayers would be answered. I will wait my turn.”

Years went on and Nahti-poo’s turn never came; nevertheless he throve and grew strong, and was as happy as most people; for when he put off praying for the things he seemed to need so as to leave room for others, he would find presently that he could do almost as well without, or sometimes would even forget that he had ever wanted them. Then another want came, and then another; and Nahti-poo put them all by, because it was not his turn, or because there were others in greater need.

Now and again, however, good things would come to him quite unexpectedly, though he had not prayed for them; then Nahti-poo would laugh and sing and enjoy it as a great joke; for truly it was a thing to laugh about that so much good should come to one who had done nothing to deserve it. And he wondered to himself; “Does God laugh also? When He does things like that, is it for a joke?” This was something he would like to know.

Nahti-poo went to the temple and inquired of the priest whether God ever made jokes; but the priest, angry at being asked such a question, cried on him as a blasphemer and drove him out. What right, indeed, had Nahti-poo to ask such a question of him—Nahti-poo who came to the temple along with the rest, but did not pray or make offerings as others did? And so, untaught by the priest, Nahti-poo went on making thoughts to suit himself, and therewith remained satisfied.

One day he saw a young calf going by in a cart, with a net over it, and its mother followed after, lowing as she went.

Nahti-poo said to his father: “When cows pray, do the Gods answer their prayer?”

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“Silly one!” said his father, “cows cannot pray.”

“They live,” said Nahti-poo, “and have needs just as we do.”

“They live only to die,” said Kayrahmam; “they have not souls as we have.”

“But men die also.”

“The soul does not die. The body dies, but the soul lives on for ever. Men pray because they have souls.”

But Nahti-poo was no longer attending; he was not thinking about souls, he was thinking about cows. He went into the temple; it was quite empty. He drew near to the great image on the shrine; he and the God were alone there together.

“Eye of Heaven!” he said, but could get no further; he stopped. “After all,” he said to himself, “how do I know that the cow needs praying for? The Eye of Heaven sees her better than I can.”

Upon his return home, remembering his father’s word, he inquired of him: “If men’s souls live for ever, why do they pray not to die?”

“Life is good,” answered the rope-maker. “What will happen to us after we do not know.”

“But it happens all the same.”

“If we please the Gods by our prayers, they make things better for us.”

“Does it please them to be prayed to?”

“Of course! Why else should one trouble?”

“My father,” said Nahti-poo, “I have never prayed to thee, yet thou feedest me. Art thou better than the Gods?”

Kayrahmam sat and considered awhile, theological discussion being strange to him. “I feed thee,” he said, “so that when thou art grown thou mayst be a support to me in my old age. Thou, also, wilt beget a son to take care of thee hereafter.”

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At these words Nahti-poo's mind was filled with a great sense of worship; he went softly out and stood looking at the light. "O Eye of Heaven!" he cried, "I, too, shall beget a son!" It had never occurred to him before that this would happen, though every day in the temple he heard others praying that they might have children. "Wait, wait!" he said to himself, "It is not my turn yet. When it is, the Eye of Heaven will show it to me."

Yet there were some he knew that went on praying in spite of everything. One was a poor woman who had been married for ten years, and in that time had born to her husband nine daughters, but no son. Every time she prayed for a son and each time a daughter came to her; on the last occasion, two. "I should stop praying at once," thought Nahti-poo, "if God did that to *me*! And now, there she is going home to have more daughters! Truly the ways of men with Heaven are marvellous. Is it God, or is it themselves that they are praying to?" But though he listened hard, and considered the matter well, he could never be quite sure.

Nahti-poo was very sorry for the people whose prayers remained unanswered. "We are too many," he said to himself, "and we ask too much; God cannot attend to us. Perhaps, if one were to help him, more prayers would be answered."

The thought smiled at him. From that day forward Nahti-poo began playing a curious game; but he told nobody. If he told it, if people got to know, the fun of it would be spoiled. Standing silently in the temple, he would listen while people prayed; then secretly he would set to work and answer their prayers for them—those at least which he could.

Often they would ask for things beyond his reach or theirs; but sometimes they would ask for quite simple things, things which with a little trouble could be made, or found, or bought

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out of savings, but which they had not the energy or the patience to acquire; so, as the easiest way, they prayed for them. And Nahti-poo, all by himself, would set to work secretly to meet the demand; and one day as they got up from their beds and opened their doors, or were going solitary along a road, there the supplicants would find the answer to prayer awaiting them. That their prayer should be so answered always filled them with great astonishment—evidently they had not expected it; and Nahti-poo, watching secretly, would clap his heels with delight, as they ran hither and thither, crying to their neighbours to see the wonder that had happened to them, or sometimes (which was funnier still) they would look furtively up and down the road, and then take up and hide the answer to prayer under their cloaks, as though it did not really belong to them.

But Nahti-poo, though he answered many prayers, was not sure that by so doing he made people any happier. Sometimes they quarrelled fiercely as to whom the answer really belonged to; and Nahti-poo had simply to leave them to fight it out in their own way. He could not go forward and say: "It was I who answered the prayer, and I intended it for so and so." No; that would have spoiled everything. But he wondered sometimes if the Eye of Heaven had not just the same difficulty and the same sadness over the prayers that he answered. Did not people sometimes quarrel about them also? And if they did, what did the Eye of Heaven think about it? He began to wonder less why so many prayers were not answered; he could not doubt that the Eye of Heaven made a better choice than he did. And so, as Nahti-poo grew older, he left off playing his game, though it had so much amused him; at least he did not play it in the same way. It is not good, he thought, to deceive people.

Time passed, and Nahti-poo came to man's estate, and plied

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his trade of a rope-maker as his father had done before him. Kayrahmam, who had only married late in life, was beginning to be old and feeble; and Nahti-poo, fulfilling his expected use, worked to support him.

It was known now by all the people in the village that Nahti-poo was one that did not pray. This gave him a bad name, and many avoided him because of it; others shook their heads at him. "Some day he will know better," they said, "but then it will be too late."

But what puzzled them most was that although he never prayed himself, he would go into the temple regularly and listen to the prayers of others. When questioned about it he said: "It is by what they pray that one gets to know people. What they want, tells you what they are." If that was true, then Nahti-poo, who wanted nothing, was a difficult person to know; and of a truth none knew what to make of him—he was so different from all the rest.

The one who thought and spoke most of him was the temple priest; for neither by threats nor coaxings had he ever been able to get from Nahti-poo the offerings of meat and money which he got from others; and sometimes he would stop as he passed, and watch Nahti-poo at his rope-making with an angry eye.

"You are making a rope to hang yourself!" the priest said to him one day.

"Well," replied Nahti-poo quite contentedly, "that is one way of coming by one's death; and it is a shorter way than praying for it. I had an uncle who prayed five years to die of the disease that was killing him; and then ended by cutting his throat, so that the prayer could not be granted. If I ever come to hang myself I shall not ask God to tie the knot in the rope; I shall do that foolishness for myself."

"Nahti-poo," said the priest, "you are a wicked man, and

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your mind is full of evil; God will punish you." And more than ever he warned those who came to worship at the temple to avoid him, lest they, too, should fall into like ways of unfaithfulness.

Now all this time, while Kayrahmam his father was growing old, Nanti-poo had remained unmarried, for with the feebleness of age Kayrahmam had been taken with a curious jealousy. "I do not want a strange woman in my house," he said, "to remind me that I am old." So Nahti-poo, putting off his own need, had answered his father's prayer and remained single.

But a day came when Kayrahmam was stricken for death, so that he could no longer sit at his rope-making under the shadow of the trees; and going into his hut he lay down on his sleeping-mat, and, placing his hands on the centre of his aches and pains, he began groaning aloud, and praying Heaven to have pity on him. And Nahti-poo, hearing him in such a taking, left his work and came and sat by his side, tending him from morning to night with a woman's care. But in spite of all he could do, Kayrahmam's strength failed and his pains grew worse, and on the third day he turned toward Nahti-poo, saying: "Oh, see what a sore sickness has come upon me from the anger of Heaven at my begetting such a son! Now, therefore, repent and pray for me, lest I die!"

Then Nahti-poo came near and kneeling at the old man's feet took them between his hands and kissed them, saying: "O, my Father, life is good while it lasts, but when it fails, good is no longer in it; therefore the Gods take it from us that we may have rest. Now as I lay my hands upon thy feet because I love thee, so do thou lay thy hands upon the feet of that Life whose raiment is death. Hold His feet without fear, and it shall be well with thee."

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And when Nahti-poo had finished speaking Kayrahmam looked at him and said: "Hear me, O Ye in Heaven, that have cursed me with a son who will not pray for me! Some day he also shall be in need. Then if he look for one to succour him, let me be that one!" And so saying Father Kayrahmam turned his face to the wall and spoke not again; and soon after he was dead.

So Nahti-poo buried his father, and went back to his rope-making. And soon after, being now free, he married a beautiful maiden named Mazurah, and for a year lived with her in great happiness and contentment. And when her time came for it, Mazurah bore him a son. But things went ill with her, and being in great pain she cried to Nahti-poo: "Look, I have given thee a son, but behind life stands death! Now I am in great pain, but my fear is greater. Pray for me, Nahti-poo, lest I die."

Then Nahti-poo bowed down at her side, and laying his hands in worship upon her breast, he said: "O my beloved, surely life is good, and because thou has brought life into the world, God will be good to thee. If it be His will that thou livest, thou wilt live; but if His will is for thee not to live He will take thy pain from thee and give thee rest. Take thy little son to thine arms and behold in him the will of God." Then without any word Mazurah his wife looked at him; long and earnestly she looked at him, and turning her face to the wall so lay till evening, and died.

So Nahti-poo was left with only the child to care for. In his hands the child grew and throve, and Nahti-poo would sit and watch his foot-prints in the dust, as they went this way and that, and smile because they were so beautiful. But one day the child, when his father's back was turned, ran out in the heat of the day to play in the sun; and presently he came back saying:

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“O, Father, a snake has got inside my head, and it is sting-  
ing me! If you cannot get it out I shall die!”

Nahti-poo ran to the well and got water; and making strips of linen he wound wet bandages about the child’s head to cool it. But it did not ease the pain. The child lay and moaned; and Nahti-poo’s heart was so full of grief that it was near to breaking. But in his grief there was one ray of comfort. “He does not ask me to pray for him,” thought Nahti-poo. “That is well, for if he asked me, how could I refuse?”

Before nightfall and without having spoken again, the child died, and Nahti-poo was alone. In the days that followed, Nahti-poo wished that he too might die, yet he did not pray for it. He returned to his making of ropes; but though the priest hoped and expected it, he did not hang himself. He accepted life as it came, went on with his rope-making, and gradually grew old.

As he neared his end, people began looking at him curiously, expectantly. They had been told how surely one day the Gods would punish him for his infidelity; but as they watched his growing infirmity there was nothing they could take hold of for the satisfaction of their beliefs. His body was not more weighed down by the weakness of age, nor was his countenance more sorrowful than theirs; nor did he suffer more pain. From his years of prayerlessness patience seemed to have become a habit; in seeking less from Heaven than other people he had, perhaps in the same proportion, found more. But whether it was much or little he did not talk of it; he took what came to him and was content; and though he often went to the temple and stood amongst other worshippers, never did he pray. If anyone said to him, “Nahti-poo, why do you not pray?” he would reply, “I have everything that I need; why should I trouble God by praying to Him? Does He not know better than I what is good for

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me? I hear so many praying whose prayers are not answered; why more should He attend to mine? When so many are crying out that they cannot—is it not better that one who can should wait? ”

“ You will wait too long, Nahti-poo! ” they told him.  
“ Some day you will die.”

“ And when I am dead,” said Nahti-poo, “ what will there be to pray about? ”

“ You may find yourself in Hell! ” they warned him.

“ If I lost myself there,” said Nahti-poo, “ then, indeed, I should have something to start praying about. But why make trouble beforehand? ”

When Nahti-poo talked like that people called him a blasphemer. “ He will come to a bad end,” said they, “ of that you may be sure.”

Yet Nahti-poo could remember times, far back in his life, when he had wished and even tried to pray; but the prayer would not come. “ Wait! Wait! ” he had said to himself then. “ It is not your turn; when it is, the Eye of Heaven will show it you.”

At last came the day that so many had waited for, curious to see what he would do; Nahti-poo lay dying. The people and the priest came and sat about him, and cried: “ Now pray, Nahti-poo, for now you are about to die! ”

“ What shall I pray for? ” inquired Nahti-poo.

“ Pray lest from the sleep of death thou awake in Hell! ”

“ Surely,” said Nahti-poo, “ if it please God that I should awake in Hell, all my praying shall not make it otherwise. How can I will other than the will of God? ”

So presently Nahti-poo died, and passed to the confines of the other world, which is the world of spirits. And as he stood upon its borders, all about him was grey mist; there was no before, and no after, nor any sign of a place toward which he

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might go. So Nahti-poo, seeing nowhere to go, stood still and waited, having no cause to hurry himself. And presently he saw, standing before him in the dimness, a man with his face averted, who said: "Art thou a traveller in this land?"

"I am no traveller," replied Nahti-poo, "for I see nowhere to go. But show me a way, and I am quite willing to go in it."

"Follow me, then," said the other, "for I was sent to show thee the way thou must go."

So Nahti-poo set out to follow his guide; and as the other strode on swift of foot, Nahti-poo trotted after. Presently being short of breath, he called: "Truly, friend, if thou wast sent to be my guide there is more zeal than discretion in thy feet; for I came from an old body, and the weakness of my earthly pilgrimage still clings to me. Therefore be patient with one who is not so young as thou art."

The other answered: "In this land the weakness of age lies not before but behind; and the farther thou goest the more shall thy strength return to thee. When first I came hither I was older than thou art."

"Truly, then," said Nahti-poo, "this place has agreed with thee, for thy speed is like the speed of an ostrich."

Then said the other: "Now we be come to cross-roads; tell me thy name and what thou art, so I may know whither farther I am to lead thee."

Nahti-poo answered: "I am the son of Kayrahmam, the rope-maker, and my name is Nahti-poo."

Thereat the other stopped, and turned, and looked at him saying: "O, Nahti-poo, thou who wouldest not pray to save thy father from death, farewell, go forward, and find thy way alone; and if thou have need of Heaven, ask Heaven to help thee according to thy deserts; but I will not."

And as Nahti-poo gazed thereon with eyes of recognition,

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the face of his father Kayrahmam vanished before him in the mist, and he stood alone.

And presently, as he waited, he became aware of one who stood veiled before him, and said: "Art thou a traveller in this land?" And Nahti-poo answered: "I am a traveller, but I have no guide." Then said the other: "Follow me, for I have come to guide thee in the way thou shouldest go."

So Nahti-poo set out to follow his new guide; and now the mist was so deep about him that he could scarcely see the form that went before him. So presently he said: "If I am to follow thee as my guide, let me hear thy voice, else in the darkness my feet may stray, and we shall be parted."

His guide said: "Tell me thy name, and I will call to thee."

And he answered: "I am Nahti-poo, the son of Kayrahmam, the rope-maker."

Then his guide stopped and turned, and, lifting her veil, said: "O, Nahti-poo, who would not pray for thy wife to be delivered from pain and fear, the way is dark before thee, but thou hast no need of *my* voice to guide thee. Farewell, go forward; find thy way alone. If thou art in need, ask help of Heaven, and Heaven will help thee according to thy deserts."

And at the word Nahti-poo saw his wife Mazurah bowing down before him, and over her face fell the veil of darkness; and again he stood alone.

Patiently he waited; the air grew dense and dark with mist; not a hand's-breadth could he see, this way or that, before him. The more he peered and searched, the deeper seemed the wall of darkness by which he stood enclosed. Presently he felt a hand touch his, and a child's voice said: "O thou traveller in this dark world, I am to be thy guide. Give me thy hand, and as I lead, do thou follow."

But Nahti-poo reached out both his hands and laid them

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upon the child's head saying, "O little son, whose head I thus held when thou wast dying, surely I know thy voice and the sweetness of thy intent. Now go thy way, for I am Nahti-poo thy father, that loved thee, and would not pray for thee; and into no deeper darkness than I am now canst thou lead me. Go thy way, little son; if I have any further need, I will ask help of Heaven."

And as Nahti-poo spoke, all the darkness that was about him broke and passed away in a broad radiance of universal light; and he beheld before him the Eye of Heaven encircled by a million presences, of human form, but of a beauty and a reasonableness and a persuasiveness such as neither in mind or imagination had he ever dreamed to be possible.

But as the Eye of Heaven looked at him, all else became as naught; and he stood absorbed into the oneness of that light, which seemed both to pass through and to embrace him. And as the sense of its power and loveliness grew on him, he bowed down his face to the ground, and becoming blind to the outwardness of things saw only their true inwardness.

Then, as the Eye of Heaven gazed on him, came a Voice also, saying, "Who art thou?"

And he answered, "I am Nahti-poo, the son of Kayrahman, the rope-maker."

And the Voice said "Nahti-poo, what hast thou done to show forth My praise and honour among men?"

And Nahti-poo answered, "Lord, I have not prayed to Thee."

As he so said, the Eye and all those presences standing about looked at him with larger gaze; and Nahti-poo's soul was like a piece of pale glass held up to the sun, having no before and no after, and no shadow or secrecy of its nature left.

And the Eye of Heaven said, "Nahti-poo, wherefore didst thou not pray?"

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“Lord,” said Nahti-poo, “I waited till I had need.”

“And hast thou,” said the Eye of Heaven, “lived all the years of thy life on earth never having felt need?”

“Truly, Lord,” said Nahti-poo, “I could often have invented one; but if one begins where is one to end?”

The Eye of Heaven gazed on him for a while, and the pure lustre of its rays changed and burned with a strange twinkle of lights. Then said the Voice celestial, “Nahti-poo, bend down thine eyes and look on Hell!”

The foundations of the floor on which Nahti-poo stood were shaken and divided from side to side; and between him and the Throne of Judgment there opened a deep gulf, on which he stood, and stooped and looked down. And as he looked, he caught back his breath, and covered his mouth with his hand; and up from below came a confused babel of voices crying.

And the Eye of Heaven said, “Dost thou see Hell?”

“Yea, Lord,” said Nahti-poo, “I see it, and hear it; and it is not the place that I would go to, for they that dwell in it are full of unsatisfied wants, and of desires that cannot be appeased; nor if they were, would it be good for them. Therefore are they in torment without end.”

Then said the Eye of Heaven, “What is it, Nahti-poo, that they are doing down yonder?”

“Truly,” said Nahti-poo, “it seems to me they are praying.”

Then out of the light around him to Nahti-poo came word: “Lift up thine eyes and look on Heaven.”

And Nahti-poo lifted his eyes, and looked; and his mouth opened and became wide with astonishment as he stood gazing speechless.

Then said the Eye, “What dost thou see in Heaven?”

Nahti-poo breathed a deep breath and said, “I see the Joy of my Lord.”

## THE MAN WHO DID NOT PRAY

“ In what does that Joy consist? ”

“ He is laughing at me! ” said Nahti-poo; and still, as he spoke, the widening of his mouth did not cease.

“ Why does He laugh at thee? ”

“ Because I never prayed to Him.”

Then sweetly the voice of the Beloved spoke to him and said: “ O Nahti-poo, all thy life has been a prayer. Enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord! ”

# Amiable Confessions<sup>1</sup>

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A. J. Cronin

THE record of my beginning ought really to be entitled "How Not to Become an Author". I do not submit it as an exemplar, but rather as a warning. (Yet I *am* apparently an author, and, to my amazement, an author who makes a living from his trade.)

Most novelists who suddenly blaze into print after they have reached the thirties have practised their vice secretly for years. If you tax them with it they may pass the thing off with a laugh, but in their hearts they cannot remember a time when they did not long to write. (Arnold Bennett, for example, is reputed to have composed a sonnet at his mother's knee; while Ethel Mannin produced some scintillating essays before the age of puberty.)

But I . . . I concealed no demiurge beneath my childish jersey. And in my adult life, for fifteen weary years, I wrote nothing but prescriptions.

Often, I admit, there were moments during my work as a doctor when the peculiarity of some patient would move me to that inhuman delight in the oddness of life which is one of the basic elements of the novelist's attitude. I did feel that here was something of life, something vivid and vital which deserved to be set down. But at the end of the consultation,

<sup>1</sup> From *Beginnings*. By permission of Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd.

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when the pen went to paper it was only to record: “R. The mixture as before.”

Many people, by-the-bye, contemplating the number of doctors who have become novelists—Conan Doyle, Georges Duhamel, Somerset Maugham, Helen Ashton, de Vere Stacpoole, and Warwick Deeping, are names which come immediately to mind—must have wondered whether there is not some important point of liaison between these two professions. But if in my own case some connexion must be found, it was merely that the rigours of general practice led me to long (naïvely, as I now know to my cost) for the “quiet haven” of authorship. And so once or twice during my medical years, after a particularly trying day, the notion of a novel would enter my head, and I would remark speculatively to my wife: “You know, I believe I could write a bit if I had time.” And she, looking at me over her knitting, would reply kindly: “Do you, dear?” Then, very tactfully, lead me to talk about my golf handicap.

But for Nemesis—or, in humbler language, a piece of seemingly bad luck—I should probably still be dealing out bromides to neurotic spinsters. There is said to be a destiny which affects our ends. In my case it affected my inside. After I had been practising several years in the West End of London, I developed what, in the army, used to be summarily denoted as a “gastric stomach”. I was, so to speak, hoist with my own petard: for ten years I had been handing out all sorts of delightful complaints, but now some of my friends in Harley Street put their heads together and handed out this one to me. I protested. I think I said that their action amounted to a breach of medical etiquette, but it was no use. The sentence, in the traditional Harley Street manner, was immutable: low diet and six months rest without the option.

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And then, as I got up from the couch in that wretched consulting room and began to hitch my braces, a dazzling thought transfixed me. "By heaven!" I thought, "gastric stomach or no gastric stomach, now I have the opportunity to write a novel." And on my way home, remembering that spelling had never been my strong point, I stopped at Mudie's and bought an English dictionary.

And so, symbolically at least, with the dictionary in one hand and a tin of Benger's in the other, I set out for the Western Highlands to create a masterpiece. Strictly speaking, then, my first book, *Hatter's Castle*, was the product of a disordered digestion and not, as one lady who wrote to me inferred, of a disordered mind.

I ought here to say that my family had accompanied me to the farm outside Inverary—a place chosen with much care as being suitable for the birthplace of a Great Work—and now they awaited developments with interest.

You see, having emphatically declared before my entire household that I *would* write a novel (tacitly inferring, of course, that it was the fault of every member of this household that I had not already written twenty novels), I found myself faced with the unpleasant necessity of justifying my rash remarks. All I could do was to retire, with a show of courage and deep purpose, to the little room upstairs which had been at once selected as "the room for Daddy to write in". Here I was confronted by a square deal table, which my wife insisted was "just the thing", by a neat pile of virgin twopenny exercise books, and—precisely laid out beside the books—by the English dictionary I had purchased so sanguinely. Nor must I forget the Benger's, treasured in some suitable domestic background, for I am proud of that bland stimulus. Too often in the bad old days brandy has been the chief inspiration of long-winded novelists.

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It was the morning following our arrival. Amazingly—for that latitude—the sun shone. Our little rowing boat danced entrancingly at anchor on the loch, waiting to be rowed. My car stood in the garage, waiting to be driven. The trout in the burn lay head to tail, waiting to be caught. The hills stood fresh and green, waiting to be climbed. And I—I stood at the window of the little upstairs room. I looked at the sun, the loch, the boat, the car, the burn, and the mountains; then sadly turned and sat down before my deal table, my exercise books, and my dictionary. “What a fool you are,” I said to myself gloomily, and I used an adjective to magnify my imbecility. How often during the next three months was I to repeat that assertion—each time with stronger adjectives.

But in the meantime I was going to begin. Firmly I opened the first exercise book, firmly I jogged my fountain pen out of its habitual inertia. Firmly I poised that pen and lifted my head for inspiration.

It was a pleasant view through that narrow window: a long green field ran down to a bay of the loch. There was movement. Six cows, couched in the shadow of a hawthorn hedge, ruminated; an old goat with an arresting beard tinkled his bell in search, I thought, of dandelions; a yellow butterfly hovered indecisively above a scarlet spurt of fuchsia; some white hens pottered about, liable to sudden flusters and retreats, some more majestic fowls strutted in sudden excitements and pursuits.

It had all a seductive, dreamlike interest. I thought I might contemplate the scene for a minute or two before settling down to work. I contemplated. Then somebody knocked at the door and said, “Lunch time.” I started, and searched hopefully for my glorious beginning, only to find that the exercise book still retained its blank virginity.

I rose and went downstairs, and as I descended those white

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scrubbed wooden steps, I asked myself angrily if I were not a humbug. Was I like the wretched poet d'Argenton in Daudet's *Jack*, with his *Parva Domus*, *Magna Quies*, and his *Daughter of Faust*, which, as the days slipped on never progressed beyond that still-born opening sentences: "In a remote valley of the Pyrenees teeming with legends. . ." Was I like that? I carved the mutton glumly. My two sons, removed by their nurse to a remote distance in order that they might on no account disturb the novelist, had returned in spirits. The younger, aged four, now lisped breezily: "Finished your book yet, Daddy?" The elder, always of a corrective tendency, affirmed with the superior wisdom of his two additional years: "Don't be silly. Daddy's only half finished." Whereupon their mother smiled upon them reprovingly: "No, dears, Daddy can only have written a chapter or two."

I felt not like a humbug, but like a criminal. For my worry was not merely the ridiculous one of justifying myself before the household, but a far greater anxiety about our future. Naturally this enforced rest would eat into my savings, and the prospect of ultimately returning to a profession I disliked would not hasten my recovery. It seemed to me that the success of this projected novel was my only hope. And yet I had wasted a whole morning dreaming at a window!

I remembered the aphorism of an old schoolmaster of mine. "Get it down," he used to declare. "If it stays in your head, it'll never be anything. Get it down." So after lunch I went straight upstairs and began to get my ideas down.

I took immense pains with that first chapter, and laboured over such redundant details as a minute description of the "Castle", reading up Architecture in the *Encyclopædia* in my burning desire for accuracy. I can smile now at the many hours I spent creating this and other waste tissue. But then, some of the technical difficulties of writing proved very great.

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For instance, I was always dissatisfied with the construction of sentences, and went to endless trouble to alter them into forms far less effective than the original. Again, I wrote the first two parts without in the least knowing what was going to happen in the third book, but here the character of the Hatter came to my aid and carried the novel to its inevitable ending.

Indeed, I could fill a volume with the emotional experiences of those next three months. There were, inevitably, moments when the thing possessed me, and I thought—surely, yes, surely this is worth while. You remember how Thackeray, writing feverishly far into the small hours of the morning, finished that scene in *Vanity Fair* where Becky is discovered by her husband, Rawdon, with my Lord Steyne, and how, carried away by his own feelings, Thackeray threw down his pen and cried to the empty room: “Sublime sir! By heavens, it’s sublime!”

Blundering along in this first incoherent attempt at self-expression, it came even to me—a faint gleam of this achievement, the feeling that something was rising out of the dead words.

But there were other moments—not moments, but hours, and even days—when nothing in the universe was right, when I classed myself morosely as an inept, presumptuous fool—madder than the Hatter I was attempting to create. I shall never cease to wonder how I managed to finish this novel. I had no reason whatever to believe that I could succeed in the task I had set myself. But my lack of confidence was balanced by the ceaseless drive of my anxiety. I argued with myself that failure meant a return to doctoring, that I must carry through this one attempt to escape. If it was unsuccessful I could at least return to my work and resign myself to my fate knowing that I had made the only possible effort

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for freedom. However, in spite of my reasonable arguments, these alternating moods were difficult to subdue.

I remember vividly the day—it was in point of fact my birthday—when the typescript of Book I arrived from London. My typist, an elderly, infirm lady who had been a patient of mine, had done her work nobly. Yet, when I read those first chapters, my heart sank within me. “Have I,” I asked myself, “written this awful, this incredibly awful nonsense?” The words leapt at me from the pages with devastating banality. I felt not like an author but like an idiot, and I had the impulse there and then to tear up all that I had written, to abandon the whole thing. Without knowing it, I had reached that stage which, I am now informed, every author reaches with every book. It is the stage when the author stands, so to speak, with his manuscript in his hand and cries out to the moon: “Am I going on with this, or am I not?” This rather touching picture of an author at the cross-roads is faintly reminiscent of Alice’s interview with the Cheshire Cat. But the position, though ludicrous, is not altogether pleasant, and the impulse towards destruction—I mean, naturally, of the manuscript—is a powerful one.

In my own case, for better or worse, I withstood temptation—the balance fell against the tearing. I went on writing. I wrote harder than ever. I wrote, indeed, as many as five thousand words each day. I finished the book with a last desperate spurt. Good, bad, or indifferent I did not then care. The only thing that mattered was that I was rid of it. The relief, the sense of emancipation was inexpressible. It was finished; I had done it; in three months I had written a novel; and so a sense of achievement intermingling subtly with this glorious feeling of freedom, I began to row, to fish, to climb those mountains to my heart’s content.

But now, gradually, through this afterglow of triumph,

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realization came that the labour of writing the book was not quite everything. There was, for example, the minor matter of publication. I hadn't thought of that before. I felt myself at a very real disadvantage, as I had no friends in the Press, no influence in the world of letters. I knew none of those pashas whose advertisements blazon the pages of literary supplements, and so I was obliged to choose a publisher at random. My conception of a publisher was like the young James Barrie's idea of an editor—a godlike creature approachable only by lesser deities. I was very much afraid that this omniscient being might not condescend to acknowledge my tentative communications. And so, with this doubt in my mind, I wrote to *four* publishers, asking if they were prepared to read my manuscript. I hoped that, with luck, one of the four might deign, in a moment of absent-minded graciousness, to reply.

They all replied. I tell you this to explode the fallacy that unknown authors cannot get their manuscripts read. And not only will manuscripts be read. If work has merit at all, it will be accepted. Publishers are not too ruthless, but too kind. They accept far too many first novels, in the same spirit, I suppose, in which racegoers back "dark horses".

In my own case the first publisher stated that he would read my novel; the second that he would be pleased to read my novel; the third firm informed me that they would be very pleased to read my novel; but the fourth, ah, the fourth gentleman—he said that he would be *delighted* to read my novel. He, then, in his courtesy, became my victim. I dispatched the manuscript to him by return of post. Then I deliberately put the whole venture out of my head.

I am not ignorant of the polite fiction of the anxious author rising each morning, with straining eyes and palpitating bosom, to meet the postman; but, although I will concede

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that author at the cross-roads, I cannot help to perpetuate the picture of the author quivering at the postman's knock. At any rate, I was not like that. I was aware now, only too sadly, too fully aware of the faults in my work. I knew that it was too long, too ponderous, too thoroughly over-written. I knew that it had no merit but a possible sincerity, that it had not the remotest chance of recognition. And so I made the subject taboo amongst my family. I announced that when this thing—we had fallen into the habit of calling it *the thing*—when this thing returned there was to be no word spoken of condolence or regret.

I was stunned when, a month later, I received word that *the thing* had been accepted. Though I shall never forget the wild exhilaration of that moment, hours passed before I completely realized my phenomenal luck. Then for some time the whole household was topsy-turvy with excitement. When I calmed down, I decided that I must be very level-headed, and wondered staidly whether the book would sell enough copies to justify postponing my return to medical work in order to write a second novel (now that the first step was taken, I did not dare to contemplate the possibility of giving up my practice altogether).

The events which followed made me feel that at any moment I might wake to cold reality from this delightful dream. The novel was chosen by the Book Society, and has since sold one hundred thousand copies in this country and America. It was translated into six languages. It was serialized and dramatized. And, crowning touch of magnificent unreality, a shop in Bond Street now sports the name of *Hatter's Castle*.

I never pass that establishment without experiencing an inward twinge, but whether it be ecstasy or remorse I cannot tell.

# Dressing Room

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Michael Fessier

SIX fighters were in the room getting ready to go on. It was a dingy room with hardly enough space to hang up your clothes and things. When a fellow stretched out his leg to pull his tights on he was liable to kick someone on the other side of the room. The room had benches built all around it, but when the fellows started taking stuff out of their bags it didn't leave much room to sit down. Most of them dressed standing up, and used the bench for their stuff. You know the stuff fighters carry. Mouth guards and boxing shoes and things. They take up a lot of space.

There wasn't any ventilation in the room. Some of the fellows were smoking stogies and cigarettes, and most of them had perfumed stickum on their hair. You'd get a whiff of stickum and cigarette smoke, and you'd think the room was full of it. Then all you could smell would be sweat. After a fighter trains he always takes a shower. Some fellows that never take a bath when they're not training wouldn't think of not having a shower every time they do train. It's just part of training. It gets hot in a dinky fight club and the fighters sweat like horses.

Three of the preliminary boys already had their things on and were shadow-boxing. You could tell they were green-horns. The guys that knew their stuff were taking it easy.

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Some of them were smoking. A fighter isn't supposed to smoke, but for what he gets, what the hell? When he starts out he trains like a champion, then he gets to figger it's just a lot of hooey, and he does what he wants just so 's he doesn't get too drunk before a fight. The three prelim boys were standing in corners doing footwork and punching at the air and looking out of the corners of their eyes to see if the old-timers noticed how good they were. Fighters are all that way when they start.

Kid Peters was going to fight the main event. He was sitting back smoking and grinning at the prelim boys. He winked when one of the old-timers looked at him. You wouldn't catch Kid Peters getting excited about a fight. He was twenty-seven years old and he'd been in more than a hundred battles. He was pretty good, too. He got as high 's seventy-five a fight. After his manager took his cut he had about forty left, and that's more than some of the fellows made in a month. Kid Peters got sometimes as many 's four fights in a month.

"Hey, Congo," he said to one of the fighters, "I see you're gonna fight Lonnie MacElroy. Boy, your manager must wanna get you killed!"

Congo was a shine. He was always grinning and cracking jokes. His face was kind of flattened out and his lips looked like saw teeth, they'd been sewed together so many times. He'd a patch over both eyes where some cuts hadn't healed yet.

"Yeah bo," he said, like all shines talk, "he seem to. He says the fans like to see a cullud boy get beat up. He say dat Lonnie do such a good job de las' time the fans like to see it again. Boy, how dat Lonnie hit! He knock me out heah and I come to three day latah on a street cah. Boy, I don' want the fight to-night, but the managah say it's that or nothin' an' I needs the thutty bucks."

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Then he started whistling. He didn't give a damn whether school kept or not.

Young Sullivan started taking off his pants. He'd only had about a dozen fights and he was nervous. "What about this Dynamite Murphy I'm gonna fight?" he asked like he didn't care very much. "He any good? I never seen him before."

The fighters that were going to meet the boys in that room were in another room. The promoter didn't let them use the same dressing room, he was afraid they might frame the fight. So the guy you were going to fight dressed in one room and you dressed in the other.

"Aw, what you care?" Battling Mexico asked Young Sullivan. "You'll find out when you get there."

He was a Mexican and he was a pretty good boy. Only trouble was he was a slugger and he was all cut up. His nose was so flat he snorted when he breathed through it, and the fans always got a kick out of him. He'd fight anybody his manager told him to, and he usually put up a good scrap. The fans liked him.

"Aw, I don't care," said Young Sullivan, kind of sore. "I just wondered, that's all."

He took off his clothes and started shadow-boxing round the room. The prelim boys stopped and watched him. He was a good-looking kid without a mark on him. His hair was slicked back with stickum, and you could tell he was proud of his looks. Most of the other fighters slicked their hair back the same way, but they weren't proud of their looks. They didn't have any. You could tell they were fighters a mile off.

"I hope I get through in a hurry," said Battling Mexico. "I got a date with a dame. Boy, she's a honey! I saw her just before I came down here and she's the best I've found in this town. She's got a build like a Greek. What I mean, a lulu."

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Young Sullivan quit shadow-boxing and stared at Battling Mexico. "You mean to say you was with a girl just before a fight?" he asked like he thought Battling Mexico was kidding.

"Sure," Battling Mexico grinned. "It tunes a fellow up. You oughta try it sometime."

Young Sullivan blushed and started shadow-boxing again.

"Bet you ain't never had any," Battling Mexico said, and he and Kid Peters started laughing.

The prelim boys looked at one another and giggled. They weren't over fifteen, and they looked up to Kid Mexico because he was an old-timer and knew his stuff. But they'd get the hang after they'd been in the fight game awhile. A kid gets to be a man in a hurry in the fight game.

The first preliminary kid that went out of the room got a licking. It was his first fight, and he didn't know what it meant to be hurt. You could tell that when he came in. His nose was bleeding and there was a lump big as a baseball on his cheek. His face was white and he kind of staggered when his manager lead him to a bench. He acted like he was going to blubber. He held on to his manager's hand like a kid that's fallen down and hurt himself and wants somebody to feel sorry for him.

"You did pretty good," the manager told him and went away. He had a string of boys and he couldn't waste any time on the preliminary kid. The preliminary kid started to snuffle and he'd wipe the blood off his nose with the back of his hand, then wipe his eyes with it. Pretty soon he had blood all over his face. He was crying quietly, holding his head turned away so the others wouldn't know it. The others didn't pay any attention to him. The second fight was on and the crowd was roaring and they were getting kind of nervous. No matter how cool they are, fighters always get

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that way when the crowd start roaring. Once in a while the bell 'd ring and the roaring 'd stop. Then it 'd ring again and the roarin 'd start. You could tell when a fighter was getting licked. The roar was louder and it kept up a little longer after the bell 'd rung.

The second preliminary kid got off easy. His lip was cut up a little bit and one eye was black, but he won the decision. He was strutting like he'd won a main event when he came in. "I win," he said. "Hey, fellas, I win!"

Kid Peters was starting to take off his clothes. He held one shoe in his hand and grinned at the preliminary kid. "Where'd ya get them pretty pink pants?" he asked. "Borrow 'em off'n your sister?"

"Aw, my old lady made 'em," said the kid. He went over to the bench where his clothes were and pulled off his tights like they were hot. The fellows laughed and the kid hung his head and looked down at his nose. He didn't say anything more about winning his fight.

The third preliminary kid came in holding his hand to his jaw. He stood at the door and waggled his jaw and trembled. His eyes were all bugged out with fright. "I think my jaw's busted," he said, not looking at anybody. "It hurts awful when I put my teeth together. I think it's busted." He stooped over and kind of limped across the room, holding his hand to his jaw.

"Hey, you act like your leg's busted," Kid Peters told him. Everybody laughed. You see that happen every once in a while. A guy gets his hand or his head hurt and he limps like he'd busted a leg. This kid was just plain scared stiff. He hadn't known what it meant to be really hurt either.

The kid stopped near Kid Peters and leaned over toward him. "You think it's busted?" he asked like he's afraid to hear the answer. "It hurts when I put my teeth together."

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Kid Peters didn't even look up. "Aw, shut up, baby," he said. "You damn kids wanna be fighters and you get a fight, then you bawl when you get hurt. Jesus Christ, didn't you know fighters got hurt? Don't you think I get hurt? Quit belly-aching, won't ya?"

The kid limped over to where his clothes were and stood there feeling his jaw. It was a long time before he dressed.

When it came time for Young Sullivan to go out he started prancing like he was tuning up for a foot-race. He went out stepping high and swinging his arms. He was a good-looking kid when he went out but he never will be again. He fought a slugger and lost the decision. When he came back in his hair wasn't slicked back any more. It was all wet with sweat and water, and there was blood at the roots where his second had smeared it with his sponge. His nose was blue and big as a potato. He could hardly see around it. You knew right off it was busted. His right ear was swelled up into a hard red ball and he had his hand cupped around it. He wasn't touching it. A cauliflower ear's sorcer even than an abscessed tooth.

"Well, well," said Kid Peters, "if good-looking ain't got a bent nose and a busted ear. Wait till your girl sees ya." He and Battling Mexico laughed.

Young Sullivan didn't look at Kid Peters. He didn't look at nobody. He just dragged his feet toward his clothes and started putting them in like he was doing it in his sleep. Once in a while he'd start to touch his ear, then he'd jerk his hand away quick and tears'd come into his eyes. A cauliflower ear hurts like hell. His nose wouldn't start hurting until later. Then it'd be worse than the ear. It was already so swelled up he couldn't breathe through it. He was breathing through his mouth and spitting out blood once in a while.

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You could hear the crowd yelling outside and you knew they liked the fight. Battling Mexico was in the ring fighting a white kid. The bell rang and the roaring died down a little bit, but the fans still were plenty excited. You could tell by the way they sounded. The bell rang again and the roaring started. Then all of a sudden the fans were booing. When they boo they're mad and they make more noise than they do when they're excited. They were still booing when Battling Mexico came in.

He was all doubled up. His mouth was twisted like he was grinning and his eyes were closed. He fell on a bench and reached down and pulled his tights off with one jerk. Then he started kicking his legs slowly like he was swimming. His mouth was still twisted and every time he breathed he groaned. He'd been fouled. He was sprawled back on the bench and his manager was bandaging his hands. "Boy, it's a good thing you saw your girl before you came here," Kid Peters said. He and the manager laughed.

Battling Mexico didn't answer him. He rolled over on the bench and got sick. You could tell he'd been drinking before he went in. You could smell alcohol. It'd have made you sick, the smell in that room. It was hot, and there wasn't any air, but that wasn't what was making Mexico sweat. It was pain.

The crowd was yelling again. It wasn't like the noise they make when they're seeing a hot fight. It's what they do when they think something's funny. They were yelling and laughing and whistling. Once in a while you'd hear somebody with a loud voice make a wise-crack and the whole crowd'd laugh at the joke. The bell rang and the crowd laughed some more and then they were quiet.

Congo's manager helped him into the room and to the bench. He kind of shoved him against the wall and walked

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away. "You wasn't hurt," he said. "You just quit. And you expect me to get you fights." He was sore as hell.

Congo slid down to the bench, holding his hand over his mouth. Blood was running between the fingers and running down his arm to his elbow and dripping on to his legs. There was a cut on his cheek and his right eye was closed. His other eye was wide open but he didn't seem to see anything.

"Boy, you can take it!" Kid Peters said as he went out, grinning.

Congo looked at Kid Peters but didn't say anything. He kept staring at the door after Kid Peters'd gone out. He started to get up and all of a sudden he fell flat on the floor. He threw out his arms and his head rolled sideways. His mouth was open and he was bleeding so much his teeth looked red. His eyes were open and all you could see was the white part of them.

Somebody went to get his manager.

The crowd was still booing when Kid Peters came in. He was grinning. One of the preliminary boys asked him if he'd won.

"Naw," he said, "they run in a substitute on me. A tough boogie that hits like hell. I ain't a sucker. I took a dive. Let the damn crowd yell. I get my forty bucks, and to hell with this town!"

He whistled and started dressing. His hair wasn't even mussed. He was a smart guy. He knew when to take a flop.

Congo's manager started dragging him out to the office where the doctor'd look at him. He had Congo under the armpits and he was leaning way over so's not to get blood on his white pants.

While the fighters were waiting for their money in the little office near the box-office the crowd went out, talking and joking. Mostly they were talking about the fights. They said

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they thought Young Sullivan 'd amount to something when he got toughened up a little bit. They said they didn't think Battling Mexico 'd been fouled and the boxing commission ought to hear about it. They said wasn't Congo funny wobbling around like he had rubber legs after MacElroy hit him with that right? And they said if the promotor put Kid Peters on again they'd be damned if they'd come back.

# Madonna Simonetta

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Vennette Herron

**F**LORENCE is like Greece, Sicily, Ireland, Bali. . . . Old gods still live there, and occasionally make magic upon a mid-summer night.

Two students backed against the Lung' Arno buttress, both dark and sleek, with hats cocked at artist's angle—the river behind, the promenade before them—watching the full-flowing streams of humanity in the heat. Baedeckered spinsters—families with children—groomed *forestières* on their way to the opera. “La Baronessi in *Norma*? Martinelli says . . .” Two passing Englishmen, unheard, however, by the two students, otherwise absorbed.

“The little *Americane*, the American girls are best—with their long legs and their almost nakedness—*vero*? If Angelini accepts, wilt be my second witness, thou? Thanks. Yes, at Alfredo's yesterday. . . . Saying that poor Pietro had killed himself for that Russian boy, when it was because he failed to win a prize at the San Gallo—after working six months on one head. . . . No critic is a gentleman, anyway! So I threw a glass of wine in his face; then sent him Marco. But he hasn't answered yet—hiding probably—*borgheze* that he is! No—Thursday. . . . To have time to finish another sketch

first for my 'Procession'—just in case. . . . *Per Bacco!* Didst see that one? Sheer Titian! If one could only get her to pose! But. . . . No—she doesn't look it. Till Thursday then. *Ciao, carissimo.*" Embracing, kissing each other upon both cheeks. Glorious that one had sent out that challenge; both felt it consciously—the upholding of romantic traditions in a world of slipping romance. Rafaello hummed as he strolled along.

In about the year 1400 a girl fell asleep in Florence so hard that men called her dead and buried her there. When she awoke again, it was to find herself once more a baby, in a simple white farmhouse at the edge of a small Connecticut village, with much that had happened to her in more fantastic realms wiped out. The village grew and Bici with it, unable to say that she remembered, yet retaining always somewhere within her the knowledge of older and richer vibrations—of things more magnificent, more poignantly alive and appealing than any which she saw around her. Things which drew and drew her . . . until now in 1933 she walked again along the Ponte Vecchio, still not quite recalling, yet familiarly—loving every stone and sliver of its ancient wood—its cluttered irregularity. . . . At home there, in spite of the frightening little voices talking to her out of the air. "Do it now! Go on, baby! . . . Coward! Do it!" In the back of her too-tired brain she heard and saw them— wee curly heads between twin tiny wings—innocent eyes and merrily malicious mouths—astral *gamins*—Florentine cherubs.

"Soon—but I must wait—there are still people."

Better waiting here than alone in her haunted-by-worry, unpaid-for tower room, though. Fortunate in that, Bici—clad in poet's armour, able to see herself always as part of a play, so that pleasure and pain were alike to her, if only they made a picture. And here they did. What a traffic and glitter! Cosimo di Medici's goldsmiths' shops upon either side. Brace-

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lets, boxes, ear-rings; intricate, made by hands loving what they shaped, not by machines. Emeralds and pearls, corals and cameos, ivory crucifixes, Venetian brocades, broken-threaded. At the Borgo San Jacopo end of the bridge an old sweetmeat vendor prepared twisted cubes of coloured sugar over a charcoal brazier. “*Signorina?*”

“I’m sorry—no.” Usually she did buy; but to-night it was impossible. Bici wheeled to stroll back, crossing composedly to the opposite kerb—proud of attracting no attention; for it *was* a difficult moment. Tourists—aggressive Anglo-Saxon voices—a few Germans. All arrogant, patronizing, purchasing the city. “Good old town . . . made for use . . . for our holiday. . . . How much?” And lovely Florence, laughing lazily in her mustard-satin sleeve. . . . Taking their money, of course, but secure in her own beauty and knowing that the soul of her did not change. Bang! Midnight! Shops closing at last. Wooden shutters going up. The glitter snuffed out—and the noise.

“Now—I must!” Under the central arches, beneath the Grand Duke’s gallery, Bici sat down upon the parapet. Ghosts—the only audience she would ever have now. The Ponte Vecchio stripped was an ochre-grey ghost itself, misting into the night, quivering under the pageantry of passing generations. But not even yet wholly hers. For after the departure of the foreigners, dribbling carelessly back, came the Florentines of to-day. Not deliberately, yet positively as an army, making the Old Bridge theirs again. A sleepy, clumping horse dragging an empty *carrozza*, the coachman nodding upon his high seat. Workmen homewarding from the wine-shops. A coroneted car carrying an amorous aristocrat with a lady. Several smartly caped and booted young officers. A single street-sweeper, scavenging, cat-like. Last and best the drifting boys, strumming their guitars and singing, as they

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always sang on summer nights. Gaily ironic little songs about politics—melting love-songs about life and death in minor keys—“What are roses to me, if for me they have no perfume?” Staring at Bici curiously, contented and indifferent.

Under her breath, in a husky whisper, she tried to sing with them, her fingers plucking at imaginary strings. “What are roses to me . . .” But sobs choked her throat, and she broke off.

Then they too were gone; and she was really alone—facing the water, swinging her feet out over it. A metallic mirror, sepia and silver, splashed with spreading orange lights from medieval lanterns hanging under the arches of mouldering, ancient palaces. Warm and sultry as the air it would be—after the first shock. Voluptuous, like smothering oneself in black velvet. Bici shivered.

“But I must!” Relaxing a taut hold upon the wall-ledge behind her she took a vanity-case from an otherwise flat purse, and repaired her make-up. “Yama—Pluto—Osiris—whoever comes for me perhaps will hurt me less if I’m ready to flirt with him. And for the final gesture a cigarette, of course—men always do.” She lit the badge of courage with a trembling hand. Puffed slowly until the stub burned her fingers. Dropped, it made an infinitesimal flying spark—quickly, so terribly quickly quenched.

Should she cross herself? But what was the use? Hadn’t she been to all the cathedrals, burning candles, begging the Madonna, San Antonio and the rest for a well, new throat? And for answer only the cherubs, still margining her in the air, like a manuscript made by some old monk. Mocking her. “Well? . . . And anyway you do not really die, you know. We are here.”

“And we—although men have so nearly forgotten us.” And suddenly out of the Arno itself—out of the mists which came

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toward morning—there seemed to be rising a shadow—masculine, beautiful, young, yet far older than all of the churches and cherubs—someone standing for life, not death. Bici did not know how the words came to her; but as though she had always done it, found herself whispering: “Eros—Dionysus—Apollo—help me!” They would still have love, anyway—men had always had it. Raising her body upon strong little wrists, she held herself stiffly above the stone, feet thrust straight out before her, balancing. Her eyes searched the sky. There were no more voices and no more visions. “I will count three; then do it—beautifully. One . . . two . . .”

“Can I help the *signorina*? ” Is there anything——”

Bici thudded down on to the stone again, while one of the slippers plunked into the water. “Yes. Push me in, please—I mean it! ”

“Why? ” Grasping her shoulders, a man pulled her back and about, forcing her to face him, with feet once more upon the safe side of the wall. Bici had studied Italian for nearly four years, and answered in that tongue: “Because I’ve been sitting here for over an hour without the nerve to jump myself. Yet it’s what I’ve got to do! ”

“Why, again? ” His voice sounded kindly curious and compassionate; his eyes were dark and interested, but sweet—boy’s eyes, eager, but not hungry. His hair was dark and crisply curling—not kinky; big glossy curls, classical. He might have been an incarnation of the shadow which Bici had seen rising so short a time before. And his hands—lean, tapering, olive, virile—hands made for laces—for toying with snuff-boxes and swords—marvellous.

“Because I haven’t any more money—simply that! ” Bici said, blinking the tears from long auburn lashes. “And my voice has cracked; so I can’t make any. I had the ‘flu, followed by pneumonia; and——”

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“But that isn’t reason enough to die! Do you want to?”

“No—I don’t! I love life—terribly! But it’s for sale—that’s the curse! There’s a price on *everything*. And when one’s alone, without——”

“But surely you”—using the *voi*, so much easier for foreigners than the more customary *lei*—“surely you have people somewhere—in America; mother—father—brothers or sisters?”

Bici shook her head, lips quivering. “No—none. My parents both died when I was little. . . . Then an aunt brought me up. And now I haven’t even her. I fought with her—desperately—to come over here to study. I *had* to. I *had* to sing—and I couldn’t *stand* newness or ugliness. Until finally she gave in. And then last year, while I was still away, she died. I thought I had a voice, you see, and that I could earn with it money enough to find all the loveliness there is—things thousands of years old which one can dream about—I wanted them so! But it didn’t work out.” Bici bit the lips which she couldn’t still. She had literally never talked with a stranger in that way before; and realized suddenly that she was telling shamelessly—anything—everything. But when one has called upon the old gods and out of the dark a man-boy, with the most exquisite hands one has ever imagined, hauls one back from blackness . . .

“And friends?” Still holding her by one arm retainingly, he leaned himself against the wall—bonelessly, gracelessly, as though there were no trouble in the world. “Haven’t you any here?”

“No. I didn’t bring letters, you see; and I’ve been studying in Milano. I came to Florence last January because Martinelli gave me a try-out at the Politeamo. It went well, too. But right after I caught that ghastly cold. Then Gabriotti said my voice was done for—temporarily anyway; that I had to

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rest indefinitely . . . and I'd nothing to do it on, and no one left to help me. I thought I might find work as a secretary or something; but I didn't know how to go about it—and still felt so awfully sick. With left-over hospital bills too. I know some girls go to their Consuls, but I couldn't make myself. And suddenly there just wasn't any more money—not even anything to pawn. I did think sometimes, too, of just talking to someone in the street—to find a—friend. . . . But all who stopped me were abominable; and I never dared stop anyone myself. I've been more lonely here than you can imagine; yet—it's queer—Florence seems like home to me, while Puritan New England never did. However. . ." She made a little significant gesture toward the river—Bici, actress-born, yet pathetically sincere. There wasn't any solution, of course; but would he suggest one—this miracle out of the summer night? "When I couldn't pay for my room yesterday my landlady had my trunks moved out—with all my clothes in them. I haven't even clean stockings to put on—and this one has a hole in it. See!" She showed him her slipperless foot childishly—with a bit of pink toe sticking out. "And I've been such a fool . . . because I meant to jump. People have been doing it all over the world since the depression, haven't they? And I can't think of any other way. Only somehow—right here on this bridge are such loads of lovli-ness. . . . And I thought so hard that I could earn some of it . . . I can't seem to make myself believe yet that it's genuinely all over. But neither can I beg." She gulped, little-girl-wise. Not modern, competent and self-assured, as she should have been; but crumpled, helpless, adorable, product of another age—like Italy.

The boy had been listening quietly. "How old are you, *signorina?*"

"Twenty-three."

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“Your hair is Venetian; I’d like to paint it. My name is Rafaello. What is yours?”

“Bici Simons. Are you an artist?”

“Yes. Then you would be Beatrice—our Beatrice. How did they come to make it Bici—over there?”

“I don’t know. My mother did it—from reading probably.”

“You may have lived before—you may have been Dante’s. You’re beautiful enough.”

“But then I would be proud, scornful, and ironical.” Bici half smiled now; already he had done that for her. “So I’m afraid that I wasn’t she. I was born wanting things—suffering for them—hunting for them . . .”

“All things—or only *things*? Love perhaps? Have you found it?”

She shook her head. “I always called what I wanted beauty; but in the end it might have been that—over here where no one has ever lived for anything else. But now——”

“What is your other name? I forget.”

“Simons. Ugly, isn’t it?”

“Si——” The hard vowel was beyond him. “Simone? But no. . . . Ah, I know: Simonetta—who returned from the dead in search of her lover. I will call you that, shall I?”

“If you like. But you may not call me anything long. Because it’s—it’s pleasant, our talking like this—but it doesn’t change facts. And so if you won’t push me in, you must—in a moment—go away. Truly.”

“Simonetta—I am not rich,” he said.

Bici flushed a dark crimson. “You made me talk—but it is my own affair. I was only asking you to leave me!” Exquisitely, out of infinite forlornness a flash of bright temper.

Rafaello caught up her hand and kissed it. “But there are so many different ways to live,” he went on. “And then

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there is the chance that the day after to-morrow will be my last day too. Will you come with me?"

Bice shook her head half-heartedly—brought up to think that there were things she couldn't do. But his eyes were sweet, not hungry. And even though one has a rendezvous with death—upon a midsummer evening in Florence—with a god-sent comrade. . . "But why did you say that?—that to-morrow may be your last day too?"

"Because I expect to fight a duel the day after; and one never knows. . . . But do you realize, Simonetta, how gloriously free we both are—you and I—now?"

"Free—but how?" Feeling anything but that herself—especially now.

"Don't be silly, Simonetta-Beatrice! Don't you see—that if you are actually ready to die, there's nothing you can't try first. Murder—steal—sell yourself—you can think of any mad project; it's self-preservation and your right. Even the law, should it catch you, could do to you no worse or more final thing than you've decided to do to yourself. And no one anywhere can judge, if you fight for your own life, instead of taking it. It's a gorgeous thought! To have nothing—to be prepared to die—and then to live! Could anything be more perfect? Come with me. Perhaps we will find a way to make it last for ever. . . and if not, for two days and a night we will play together. And for a little part of one of them I will paint you. You shall be Simonetta in my 'Procession'. It's a pageant of old Florence passing over the Ponte Vecchio. It was to be for the exhibition at Rome next winter; and if anything should happen to me, I'd like, more than anything else, to leave that finished. And I can—almost, anyway—if you'll come. Please! And for that little time at least I can take care of you. Look up at the stars. Do you want to die, *bambina*?"

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“How can I walk?” asked Bici, looking from her wall down at him, half hypnotised, instead of up at the sky. “I’ve only one shoe now.”

He laughed at that. “Take the other off. Beggars do. Simonetta ran barefoot from her coffin to find her lover, they say; and you. . . take off your other shoe, Beatrice, and see if you can walk that way.”

Bice slid to put her feet down gingerly. “I can’t say that they hurt—the stones; they’re still warm and smooth. But people will see us.”

“But what does it matter?—when we may die on Thursday. That’s the glory of it! Will you never realize? Look, I’ll take mine off too.” He stooped to do so—socks as well; and his feet were as patrician as his hands—long, slender, unspoiled. “Do you know our legend? That if you give a gift to the Arno, she will return it some time—in love or gold? And too, that when you are away from her she will always claim and call you back? It’s a pity because they were almost new. Still—thank you for the model, River.” He hurled the shoes gaily—and likewise gallantly; for he possessed but one other pair—down into the water. *Splash—splash!*

“Luck for us both. I made a wish for each—and one was for you, Simonetta. Don’t think!” he commanded. “Am I hurting you? Come then.” He slipped his hand through her elbow—in the fashion of Florentine lover, although Bici did not know that. “My great-great grandfather rode over this bridge on a chestnut horse, with three hundred retainers at his back. But was he happier? I don’t know. Look up at the stars, Beatrice-Simonetta! Unless you really are proud and scornful!”

The sun-baked stones of the deserted streets were warmed silk beneath their feet. Occasionally a late loiterer passed but

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paid them no heed. Rafaello proudly pointing out things—scraps of sculpture upon high cornices, historic angles and arches. They passed into the Piazza Signorina, now flooded with moonlight, the too-great arc-lights gone out. “Look at the Loggia dei Lanzi. Men were men in those days!”

Bici nodded, light-headed. She had ceased to think; was following softly, half wondering if she could be already dead. Gigantic gods in marble—supermen, arch-types. In the moonlight they seemed to move. Even David was no Israelite, but a Greek. The satyrs plunged through space upon their dolphins. Beauty—dreams—they were not then dead; somewhere they lived! Even though Savonarola upon that very spot had tried to burn them off the earth, of him remained only a small square stone tablet; while the giant satyrs and the tall white pagans moved about her.

“Are you hungry, Simonetta? But of course you are. I’ve thirty-seven *lire*—enough for two days, if we’re careful; so we’ll begin with a small feast.”

Around a corner in a warmer dusk, pierced by glow from an open door, they found a café for the *vetturini*, the cabmen—for tables, long boards laid over wine-kegs: a Rembrandtesque hole, full of mahogany shadows, with low black inner door, through which came appetizing odours and a dim mellow sputter of charcoal flame. They sat alone upon a bench against the smoke-browned wall; and a man in a once-white apron came to ask their pleasure.

“*Minestra*—a thick bean soup, for the *signorina*,” ordered Rafaello, “with bread and wine—and for me a black coffee; I have already dined.”

“Have you really, Rafaello?”

“I truly have—and well,” lied he solemnly. Then grinned; for it was the first time she had used his name.

“But please!” said Bici, eating ravenously, and insisted

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upon feeding him also a few spoonfuls of the soup—upon sharing with him the revivifying warmth of the wine. “I was hungry—yes.”

Rafaello had Macedonias in his pocket, and smoked. “I’m meditating. . . . Shall we steal something down here to-night—or somewhere else to-morrow? Upon this earth are three things of worth—*l’amore, viaggiare, la gloria*—love, travel, glory. We should take them all before we leave. It will be our game to see if we can. Shall we? Are you rested, and ready for a long walk?”

“I’ve never felt less tired,” assented Bice, and meant it. Renewed and stimulated by food, through and through her shot the intoxication of a new kind of living. She would walk with the gift which the old gods had sent her—wherever he lead.

Treading so lightly now that they no longer felt the cobbles beneath their feet they passed into the Piazza del Duomo. In the night it was like a grey crystal—round, with paler grey domes and towers floating in its heart. “We’ll take a tram to San Domenico,” he said. “We must see the sun rise in the hills. We are going to journey to look at beauty together . . . we are going to find an adventure for joy . . . and then somehow, for glory, we’re coming back down again—after dark, so that Florence will not look at you to hurt you—so that I can paint you. I can draw at night and begin painting at dawn, and I work quickly. . . . fortunately; for whatever I do must be finished by Thursday noon. It’s too early for the milk-tram, and this only goes part way; but will shorten the road for us. Get in, Beatrice-Simonetta.”

Bici glanced down at her feet in their now ragged stockings; then felt ashamed and entered the tram. The conductor smiled at them. Besides themselves there were only a few *contadini* returning late to their farms. Rafaello kept his

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hand through the crook of her elbow; and drowsily she relaxed against him—the sheer comfort of it too great to resist. He looked down at her hair and stroked it gently. “*Bellissima*—perfect—absolutely Titian!” There was a kind of contented impersonality about him—the tingle and thrill in his finger-tips being half for a paint-brush. When the tram stopped he had to shake her gently. “We get out here, Beatrice-Simonetta; it’s the end of the line.”

Soft darkness, rimmed round with white. Steep ochre-grey stone walls, topped with vineyards upon either side of a narrow climbing road. The dust was soft velvet, so long as one did not stumble upon a stone; several thousands of years of plodding peasants had made it so. The villas among the cypresses were great blocks of ochre-cream, loggiaed and lightless. “I should have one of them to offer you,” Rafaello said.

They talked. After an hour of tramping, hand in hand, through lightening darkness, the dawn-whiteness growing slowly about them, it seemed that there was nothing which they did not know about each other . . . and yet it still seemed as though they might talk on for ever.

“Beatrice-Simonetta,” said Rafaello then, “I think that I have a villa to offer you. It has just occurred to me—since the world is now ours, why not take one? There are ever so many empty at this season—useful to nobody, with their *padroni* away. We could select any . . . but I’ve thought of one you’d love; and its present owner is in England, as I happen to know. He’s Sir George Tomlinson, a great patron of the arts, whom I’ve met at exhibitions, though he probably wouldn’t remember me. Yes—this way, down the Benedetto da Maiano—and we’ll pass a funny little *trattoria* where we can buy something for breakfast.”

Here the walls upon either side were broken by iron gates,

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overshadowed by trees. Above the gates hung great monastry bells. All was stillness—with the narrow strip of sky above them still tarnished, yet brightening silver. At a turn in the road they came to a wayside inn—rustic, with two sleepy peasants nodding over a table in a tiny front room. They entered, and Rafaello bought bread, sausage, ripe figs, and a small flask of sweet white wine. “In case our villa’s unprovisioned; for it’s been closed a long time. We’re going to La Primola. It belonged once to Cellini—not the painter, but a poet who was a friend of Savonarola. It dates back before the Inquisition; and . . .” He told her a story of its secret cells, prisons, and stairs. “You’d like to see those, wouldn’t you, Beatrice-Simonetta? It was terrible the way we used to live . . . But beautiful! I’d rather paint like Goya or Velasquez than one of our own masters even. We Florentines lived enough; but somehow when we painted, with all that we did, we were a little soft. Only the Spaniards got down the streaks of sheer cruelty which make for life stark—just at the line where there’s no difference between beauty and ugliness. Simonetta-Beatrice, you’re so lovely to look at that you ought almost to have a scar about you somewhere—on one thigh perhaps—or a birthmark. Have you?”

“I’ve a stubbed toe. Will that do?” Bici asked him meekly.

“If there’s nothing else. . . . *Ecco*, here we are!” A yellow stucco facade; two gates, two doors, at either side of these continuing walls. No lights anywhere, and at all of the high windows closed and barred wooden shutters. “It may be impossible; but nothing should be. You won’t be afraid for a moment alone, Beatrice?” There was an angle in the wall—there were cracks and crevices in the crumbling stones, and a great untrimmed tree leaning caressingly down as though offering its branches. Agilely, cursing occasionally in happy Italian, Rafaello, swarmed up and disappeared.

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Bici sat alone, shivering with excitement and the dawn-damp coming in. After about a quarter of an hour she heard him call. "Look! I couldn't open the gates, but I found a ladder in the stableyard. I'm going to slide it down to you; don't let it fall.

She caught the two ends to steady it; planted them well on the ground. "No, don't come; there's no need, and it's growing light—people will begin passing for the market soon. I'm coming up." And she did so—nearly as actively as he had. "Are you sure there's no caretaker or anyone sleeping there, Rafaello?"

"Of course. Don't you see how everything's boarded up? But I found a way in. Just a second—"

Descending rapidly, Rafaello brought up their packages; then he shifted the ladder and helped her to clamber down into the big courtyard. On one side of the courtyard were stables, with two or three *contadini* cottages—all dark, brooding, still. On the other side was the house, with a long wing stretching out into the cypress-grove before them. Rounding the latter, Rafaello leading her, they entered an inner garden-court, surrounded by loggias. Up a flight of outside stone stairs—along the upper gallery—finally to an opened French door. "I tried all on this side, and this one gave; the hinge on the shutter was loose and the glass not even locked. The place is enormous, as you see. But we can look at it to-morrow."

He smiled at her. They were in a great bedroom lined with pale-green brocade. There was a vast bed in it, with a canopy—green taffetas held back by gilded cherubs. "We will play that it's all ours. I will help you, Simonetta."

"Perhaps I'm only Beatrice," said Bici, tremblingly.

"Would you die without having lived, baby?" He lifted her to carry her—after the convention set by the conquerors

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of the Sabines; and her uncut red-gold hair fell over his shoulder like a stream of liquid fire.

“Do—do you mean that you love me?” whispered Bici.

He stood still for an instant then—surprisingly—holding her as easily as he did everything else. “How can I tell, *cara*? I want you! But love? Love is also an ache—a fear—all kinds of things. I could only know that I loved you if I could never have you—or if I lived with you and lost or was about to lose you. Love is the sensation which one feels for the lost and the unattainable, I think. But still there is beauty and desire. It is life that we will live together! And one can never tell—perhaps before to-morrow noon we will know if we love each other. I like to be truthful with you, Simonetta. But it’s enough, *carissima*. Don’t think! We are free . . . and we will float together; not in Arno water, but into a dream. Just as five hundred years ago, you have come back to find love—and have found me. This is for to-night my palace, and I offer it to you. How little and amber you are! And there are violet lights in your skin, and blue shadows. . . . To-morrow night, in my studio I will dress you in a shroud of gold satin to paint you.”

“But I’m Beatrice,” she protested faintly.

“You are Simonetta!” He closed her eyes with his lips.

It was clear day when they awoke; and the sun had risen without them; but was shining in upon them, beaming benignant approval—an Italian sun.

“Simonetta, are you hungry again? I will bathe you—I will feed you—I’ll turn you into a baby. You’re the most beautiful thing in the world!”

Bici’s lips quivered. There wasn’t much reason for it, if one thought, but not thinking, she felt happy, incredibly at home, secure. “And you,” she told him shyly “are like a young Dionysus. I wish I could paint, too!”

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“But to sing is perhaps more, *carissima*.”

“Only I can’t even do that now, as you know.”

“With time it may come back—your voice.”

“How much time have we left, Rafaello?” But she did not say it sadly—only striving to appear as blithely brave as he; her heart chanting: “Not alone—not alone!” She caught up the green counterpane from the bed and wrapped it about her. It hung from one naked shoulder, while her red-gold hair covered the other. “I want to see the view.”

Stepping through the glass doors on to the gallery: “Oh—Rafaello!”

For all Florence lay below her—fold after fold of softly rolling hills—all in a haze of opalescent colour. Floating gold domes and henna-red roof—the Arno like a shining needle at the bottom of a basket of tapestry silks. Slopes of silver-grey olives and lines of dark-green cypresses, silver-glinted by the morning. An old man leading a donkey down a steeply stony path. It could have been then—and it could have been a thousand years ago. . . . And that, too, was she. Bice felt a song rising in her throat; she wanted to sing to the sun! Suddenly she found herself humming . . . the sounds swelling into words—louder and louder . . . a foolish little song, heard only the night before, but sung in a way to break the heart of a world: “What are roses to me, if for me they have no perfume?”

“Simonetta!” Rafaello came to stand behind her. He had slipped on trousers and shirt; but his collar was open, and his black hair tumbling into his eyes like locks carved by Praxiteles. “Beatrice-Simonetta, you are singing again!”

She turned to him eyes of dazzled joy and wonder. “Gabriotti said that it might be nerves—that it might return sometime—but it is a miracle,” she said “Rafaello, are you really Dionysus perhaps?”

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He laughed at her and swaggered. "You see—I have brought you back to life. Sing!"

She began again—an aria from *Norma*, her voice like a soul set free.

Suddenly one of the doors in the wing across the court from them, opening on to the same gallery, flew open, and a middle-aged Englishman, in gaudy, striped silk pyjamas and a monocle, came out—came hurrying toward them, panting: "Who, in heaven's name, are you?"

Bici and Rafaello stood speechless—aghast. Then the boy bowed gravely. "You probably don't remember me, Sir George; but I'm Rafaello Marucci. You were good enough to buy a sketch of mine at the San Gallo last winter. I hope you'll forgive us, but—"

"By George, of course. 'The Last Faun'—a capital bit! But you—" Turning to Bici in his excitement oblivious apparently to the strangeness of their presence there, "aren't you Bici somebody or other, who tried out at the Politeamo last spring in *Norma*? I never forget a voice, Martinelli told me that you'd cracked; but the man must be an ass! Why—"

Bici pulled the slipping counterpane a trifle more tightly about here. "Yes; I'm Bici Simons," she admitted; and blushed—standing thus beside Rafaello, but making no move to retreat. "You'll have to forgive us, Sir George; but we broke into your house last night—because—because we hadn't any other place to sleep. And it was my fault. You see we were planning to die on Thursday; so we just decided to make it beautiful. But you mustn't blame Rafaello—it was all my fault."

"Beatrice-Simonetta, don't be silly! It was my idea, as you know perfectly well. But we didn't think you'd be here, Sir George." The boy grinned.

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“Bless my soul! I haven’t opened this house for over three years; but I happened to arrive in town last night, and came up with only my man and chauffeur, intending to take stock of the place to-day. But don’t look upset—nobody minds your being here. You look a pair of charming babies. What, in heaven’s name, did you mean by saying that you were going to die to-morrow?”

“Because Gabriotti said I couldn’t sing; and I’d tried and tried . . . and there wasn’t any money . . . and Rafaello probably has to fight a duel to-morrow; and so . . .”

Rafaello stopped her with a stern possessive shake of the head. “We made a game, Sir George, because—well, things were like that; and it just came to me that since they were, we were free to do anything. And I hadn’t a villa in the hills, and wanted one for Beatrice-Simonetta—for that little time; so decided to borrow yours. It’s the most gorgeous one about here, you know . . .” Again he grinned. He was something eternally young and eternally old—a faun himself perhaps, or a godling, with a first right to be there. Sensitive and soulless as an animal, with all the earth his.

“Isn’t it a fine place? Don’t know why I don’t live in it myself—except that I’ve so many.” Sir George, the connoisseur, looked at Rafaello with perfect appreciation. “I’m delighted to have you as guests. And don’t talk any more nonsense, either of you. Dying at your age! With a voice and a paint-brush, and all life before you! I’ll have another look at your things, my boy. I remember others—promising, very. While as for Bici——”

“Beatrice-Simonetta,” interposed Rafello crisply. Until now debonaire, he became suddenly, unaccountably grave, almost gloomy.

“Your Beatrice-Simonetta,” Sir George corrected himself, with an amused quirk at the corners of his mouth for youth,

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“can also sing like the very devil—better than when I heard her before; quite magnificently, in fact! You must let me take you to Martinelli, my dear—to-day. I was telling a friend only last night that he’s fed up with the Baronessi; and . . . Smithers’ll make us some coffee, by the way. He always carries along a tea-basket or something. Smithers!”

“I can contribute bread and *salame*, and some figs,” said Rafaello.

“Splendid! Perfect—a real breakfast; nothing could be better!” Sir George bubbled with enthusiasm. They were a happy adventure for him; and a man of his age did not have too many. “Sit down, my dear. No—stay as you are; that green is perfect for you. Here”—he himself hauled up a small round table—“Rafaello, old chap, trot along for the sausages. Smithers—Smithers—can you hear me? Hot coffee for three, at once. I say, what a topping morning! As soon as we’ve eaten, I’ll ring up Martinelli.”

“But to-day,” said Bice plaintively, “we’ve no shoes. Mine fell into the Arno; so Rafaello threw in his.”

“Of course; quite so! Haven’t heard anything so delightful in ages!” applauded their host. “But there are shoe-shops in Florence; and on our way—”

“No!” said Rafaello, so firmly and unexpectedly that it was almost rudely. “I’m sorry, Sir George; but to-day we can’t. We don’t need any more shoes, because I’ve enough at the studio, naturally—and so has Simonetta,” he added hastily. “But she promised to pose to-day for my ‘Procession’—just in case I shouldn’t be lucky to-morrow; and—”

“But Rafaello, if Martinelli . . .” Bici’s eyes were shining, and she was looking at Sir George.

“Beatrice-Simonetta—you can’t go to-day! You did promise me that. And if Sir George wants to do us a big favour, he

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could send us home soon . . . then I could have more daylight. You can go to Martinelli to-morrow or——”

“I quite understand,” said Sir George, speaking to Bici as though *she* had been protesting instead of Rafaello, in the maddening way men have of slyly backing each other up. “I’ll make the appointment for Friday instead. But I can count on you both then, can’t I?”

“We’re ever so grateful,” Rafaello thanked him gloomily. “And you can count on Beatrice-Simonetta, of course.”

Sir George looked at the young artist sharply. “It seems a pity. But you can’t back out, it goes without saying. However . . .”

“He’s a *borghese*,” explained Rafaello, “so perhaps he’ll refuse. Please dress, Beatrice-Simonetta, while there’s still hours of daylight.”

They went down the hill from Fiesole in a big car, hand in hand. Somehow, astonishingly, they were slightly less happy than when they had climbed up it. They did not know why; but they were more silent—both thinking. When they spoke, they were no longer recklessly playful; their thoughts too separate, although their hands clung together more tightly, with more need in them, than before. But they were pre-occupied. Bici would have her audience; and, if all went well, Sir George would come to look at Rafaello’s “Procession”. They had had the great adventure—they had travelled, they had loved; and the path of glory was opening out for them.

And yet. . . .

Rafaello posed her in yellow satin and painted her. He worked like a fury—or like a dark Siegfried. Tossing back his classical hair continually—in a solid orange smock, a smudge of blue across one cheek. He flung his brushes about. The “Procession” lived—it marched across the Ponte Vecchio;

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and in it Simonetta, bare-footed in her golden shroud, with a face of sheer ecstasy, glowed like a little transferred bit of those fifteenth-century masters, who have never quite been equalled.

“Turn your head to the left, Beatrice.”

Posing, Bici sang—softly, hugging her voice—loving it. Life lay in it—every dream coming back. Now she was Violetta humming and only half heard him; yet turned her head.

Rafaello, painting, saw her only half-hearing. “I don’t care much for *Traviata*,” he said. “Please stand still, Beatrice-Simonetta! If I should *not* fight to-morrow—or should fight and come home—and Martinelli wants to take you away—to Milano, for the Scala perhaps—would you go?”

“But of course! I’ve worked for it all my life. And what else—”

“If I should ask you to stay with me? I’ve only this studio . . . but I *can* paint.” He was doing so—furiously.

“But I couldn’t give up singing! And—are you asking me that, Rafaello?”

“I don’t know. But if I did—I wouldn’t have you running over the country with Martinelli to sing for other people! I would have you here—to pose and to sing for me only!” He said it savagely—still painting.

“But Rafaello—it isn’t possible . . . Not to sing!”

“You see! In the end, after all, you are Beatrice and not Simonetta. But I am not asking you.”

He went on painting. When dark fell he drew—study after study. Finally they ate: then slept for a few hours, curled up together on a tumbled divan in a corner. “It does not suit you as well. You should have the bed with the *baldacchino*—the green taffetas and the gold.”

“It isn’t that, Rafaello.”

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They were miserably happy together; there was something wrong and unfinished between them.

Marco came in the morning early. Rafaello did not admit him; but saw him in the corridor, and returned presently to tell Bici that he would fight at noon—in another much larger studio. The *borghese* had not run. It was all very secret. Rafaello's face looked sulky, stern, elated.

"But you will come back, Rafaello. You will not be hurt. And I will wait for you here."

"It's little you care! You are Beatrice. If you would not give up singing for all the world to sing for me—to sing for love."

"Are you asking me to, Rafaello?" She wanted to hear him say it, although in her heart she felt that she could not do it. There was too much in the world—the old gods had sent her too much. Martinelli. . . .

"If I come back—I would like to find you here. I think that I do not want to lose you Beatrice-Simonetta." She looked at him. There were two great tears in his eyes, and they rolled down his cheeks. "Still, while you are Beatrice, I will not ask you," he said. "You must not wish me well; it's bad luck." He kissed her quickly, and went out of the studio, closing the door firmly behind him.

Bici waited.

One hour passed. She thought of Rafaello certainly; but also she saw herself again on the stage—at the Politeamo—at the Scala. She heard audiences applauding. She saw great baskets of flowers upon the shoulders of ushers streaming up aisles toward her. She found an old guitar in a corner, tightened its strings and sang with that. She was in a kind of trance.

Two hours passed. Bici threw aside the guitar, and went to stand before the "Procession". It was good! It was more

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than good. And she herself lived again in it—perhaps would live for ever in it. He had given her back her voice—Rafaello—and he was capable of giving to the world a great beauty. She felt a thrill of pride in him. And he was hers! Or was it his habit to look for happy adventures? Bice ground her teeth at the thought.

But it was incredible that he was so long! And if—if anything happened—no one knew anything about her. Would there be anyone to come to tell her? Would the time never pass? But of course he *would* come. She would do something for him. She gathered up all of the tossed-about brushes, found a tin of turpentine, and started to clean them. . . .

Three hours passed; and still there was no word. The brushes were all clean; she had looked at all of the pictures; she had dreamed out all of her dreams; Bici lay upon the divan and sobbed.

Four hours. Bici was walking up and down—crumpled and tear-stained, with for the moment scarcely a bit of beauty left. The door opened and Rafaello came in; he had a bandage about one arm, but his eyes were shining. “It was frightfully thrilling! I got a prick; but it was nothing. Afterwards we all ate at Alfredo’s. I’m sorry, *cara*; but they wouldn’t let me get away earlier.” He was perfectly Italian; love was to him everything—and nothing. He had masculine things to do; but she must be there. “But, Beatrice—why are you crying?”

“I’m Simonetta!” she sobbed.

He gathered her up in his arms. “I would not have let you go, anyway.” He brought water to bathe her face. He held her on his knees and combed her hair. “Simonetta,” he said, after a little, “I have still nearly thirty *lire*—and I think it’s enough to buy you a new pair of shoes. I’ll go after them

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presently. You will be my model—you will be my baby. We—”

“Do you mean that you love me, Rafaello?”

He scowled at her fiercely. “I am afraid of love. But no one else may have you!”

Bice smiled contentedly. “I should like the shoes in beige,” she said.

# John Muck

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James Hanley

EVERY morning at five o'clock a little man suffering from a limp in his right leg used to pass the railway station at Bolton. Across his shoulder he carried a long broom, for he was a street sweeper for the Corporation. At exactly the minute of five he passed the station, bid good morning to the porter; passing the post office he saluted the cleaner, and so with the policeman standing outside the bank. At seven o'clock he would be seen at work in the streets adjoining the Town Hall, the police-station, the Library, and the post office. At five in the evening he returned by the same route which he had come, and whenever he passed a person who knew him he touched his cap, whilst the person addressed invariably said to himself :

“There goes John Muck.”

His real name was John Grundy, but after he had been working for the Corporation for some time he became known as John the Muckman, which later changed to John Muck. The name had stuck to him, and he would have felt a little jealous if anybody ever referred to him as plain John Grundy. The name which habit and experience had foisted on him was something in the nature of a halo. He even felt a little proud of it, for in all Bolton no man knew John Grundy, but every man knew John Muck, from the meanest

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dock labourer to the town councillor, and even the Mayor. If he wasn't a town councillor at least he was a local light of another nature.

He was small, though sturdily built, and always wore a seaman's jersey beneath his brown dungaree jacket. He wore clogs, a habit he had derived from his native place, Blackburn, where as a boy he had worked in the cotton mills. He had never renounced these in favour of boots or shoes. One could hear these clogs sounding over the pavements as early as a quarter to five in the morning. For many people they served as a kind of knocker-up. "It's just on five," people would say when they first heard the clatter on the road.

John Muck was forty-four years of age and had served in a famous line regiment during the war. He neither smoked nor drank. He had been working as a sweeper for the Corporation ever since his return from the army. He lodged with an old woman named Lizzy Rooney, in a little room in Clio Street, running off Dock Road. It was a dark and dismal street, though John never noticed anything wrong with it. He was a very quiet man. He never smiled. Certain rumours had got about in the street that he had had a love affair with a young lady in Chester, and that when he returned from the war he discovered she had married somebody else. People used to say that John Muck was like the king who never smiled again. After his day's work was finished he would return to his room, and after placing his broom safely away in the lock-up cellar, he would wash and shave himself, and go out for his evening meal. He never took any meals in his room. For one thing there was no convenience there for him to make his meals, for another, he preferred to go to the same cocoa-rooms day after day and night after night. He found it suited him splendidly. Food was good and cheap. The tea was the best made on the whole of the road. His fare never

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changed. Two cups of tea and two slices of bread at half-past six in the evening and John was full and satisfied. He then returned to his room. The room contained a small bed, two chairs, a box arrangement that had been turned into a chest of drawers. Nothing more. No pictures, no papers. Nothing. John Muck never read, never went to theatre or picture house. He would draw up his chair to the fire, though more often than not there was no fire in the grate, and sit there just thinking. John Muck was a world in himself. If one had been able to fathom some of his thoughts it might have served as a clue, or an open book even, to his life. No one knew what he felt or thought or imagined or remembered. Nothing was known. Excepting, of course, that he was a good workman, for the Corporation inspector had always found that the streets he swept were well swept—the only thing known about him, and the only thing that Mr. Muck revelled in. He liked to think that all the town looked upon him as the perfect street sweeper.

One morning he was busy shovelling his dirt into the hand-cart when one of the councillors, rather early for him, of course, arrived at the Town Hall. Mr. Muck touched his cap and bid the man good morning.

“Good morning,” replied the councillor. He stood watching John put the dirt away in the cart. He smiled, and suddenly he asked :

“Look here, John,” he said. “Wouldn’t you like another job than that? Up at the electric generating station there’s a job going on the furnace, burning all this muck you collect. It’s about five shillings a week more than you’re getting now. If you’d like it I would do my best for you. Just say the word.”

John Muck looked up and smiled at the councillor. Then he said slowly :

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“Thank you, sir. It’s very kind of you, but I prefer the job that I know best. I know this muck so well now that I never want any other job than sweeping it up. I’m quite satisfied with the job and with my wages. Thank you, sir.”

And John returned to his shovelling, whilst the councillor smiled again.

“Oh, all right,” he said. “As long as you are satisfied I don’t mind, and I don’t suppose anybody else does. It’s hard to find a man these days who is satisfied with his job.”

He left John Muck staring after him as he ascended the steps and rang the bell on the huge door of the hall. When he entered and the porter had closed the door behind him, John Muck said half aloud:

“Something funny here. I don’t like it. Perhaps they’re really going to sack me or else they’re going to make me work up at the generating station. Well, I only want the job I’m working at now. To hell with these kind people.” And he shovelled the last pile of the dirt into the cart and pushed it down the road. That evening John Muck was worried, so worried that he only drank one cup of tea at the cocoa-rooms and left one of the slices of bread uneaten. John Muck was afraid.

“I can’t help it,” he said to himself. “I like my job. I’ve been so long at it, and I can’t help it, but I’ve actually fallen in love with this muck, this broom, this old hand-cart, this shovel.”

He felt that if he were sacked off the streets he would lose not only his importance but his fame.

But though we may endeavour to shape our own lives and destinies, Fate hews differently. One morning John Muck received a shock. He was brushing outside the railway station. He had been brushing there for twenty minutes or so when suddenly the tobacco-kiosk just opposite opened up.

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A girl of about twenty was taking down the single shutter. She looked at John Muck. John looked at her. The hand holding the brush trembled, and he lowered his eyes. Something was happening inside him, yet he did not know what it was. The moment he looked into the girl's eyes the universe seemed to fade out, and all he saw was a pair of brown, laughing eyes focussed upon him. Not upon his brush or shovel, or even his hand-cart, but upon him. He looked up suddenly. The girl had gone inside the kiosk. John Muck sighed. He wanted to do things in that moment. But most of all he wanted to see this girl again. He had never in his lifetime seen such a face, such beautiful eyes, he told himself. His halo, his importance, his name, his well-being with his employers was nothing now. Something in this girl overwhelmed him. Suddenly he felt in his pocket. He pulled four pennies out. For a few minutes he stared down at the coppers in his hand. Then he walked up to the kiosk. The girl was bending down arranging boxes of cigarettes on the lower shelves. John Muck spoke.

"Half an ounce of thick twist, please," he said.

The girl stood up. She recognized him, half smiled, then weighed the tobacco. She wrapped it up and handed it to him.

"Thank you," she said.

Mr. Muck did not hear, neither did he feel the light touch of her fingers as she handed him his tobacco. John was lost. In the deep pools of her eyes he was lost. Her half smile vanished and she glared at him.

"Your tobacco," she said coldly.

He woke up then. Looked at the girl, then at the tobacco in his hand.

"Thank you, Miss," he said, and walked quietly away.

His heart was beating wildly. The girl watched him return to his hand-cart. She saw him put the tobacco inside his old

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slouch hat, then begin his sweeping of the subway. There was something in John Muck that this girl liked. She liked his hands. They were brown and strong. She wondered if he had been out in the East. Then in a moment she had forgotten him. She was once more packing her fresh stock of cigarettes into their shelves. Five minutes later she stood up again to serve a customer. She looked across the road. John Muck had vanished—shovel, hand-cart, and John Muck were gone. For a few minutes she stood staring at the place where he had stood. Then the faintest smile crossed her features and she resumed her packing.

Meanwhile John had gone up to the public incinerator with his cart-load of dirt. Somehow, as he pushed the load up the hill, he felt himself strangely tired. Or was it that he had suddenly lost his strength? He had never experienced any difficulty before.

When he reached the yard two men who worked at the furnace met him.

“Hello, John,” they exclaimed as in one voice.

But John Muck did not hear them. They thought he was deaf. They spoke to him once more. He wheeled his cart up the yard oblivious of the insults that followed him.

“Wonder what’s wrong with him?” queried one of the men.

“Stuck up all of a sudden. God knows, I couldn’t tell you what’s wrong with him.” The two men continued their task of filling the barrows full of refuse ready to wheel away to the furnace. Mr. Muck had reached the top of the yard. He passed inside a large shed. He stopped. On his right stood the great furnace. On his left a great heap of refuse waiting to be fed to the fire. John ran his cart up against the pile, up-turned it, and shot his load alongside the pile.

That evening John Muck was so strange in his manner that

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people began to notice it. John walking home was continually murmuring:

“I love that girl. I love that girl.”

And when he reached his room he placed his broom in its accustomed place, and having washed and shaved himself went out for his tea to the cocoa-rooms. The woman behind the counter who served him with his tea first noticed the change. John had ordered two sardine sandwiches and a large cup of special tea. Specially-brewed tea cost twopence per cup. The lady looked at John Muck. She half smiled as he placed his food on the table and sat down. Stranger still, John saw her smile and smiled back. It made the lady come from behind the counter and approach Mr. Muck’s table.

“What’s wrong with you this evening, John Muck?”

John did not reply. He just stared up at the woman and smiled.

“Won’t you tell me?” she asked him.

“I think I’m in love,” he said in a slow deliberate manner.

“You’re what?” asked the woman.

“Nothing,” replied Mr. Muck gruffly, and he rose hurriedly from the table and left the shop.

In the street John stood for a moment on the edge of the sidewalk. For the first time in his life he felt a disinclination to return to his room. Somehow or other all the trivial things, the commonplace things, the little local everyday urgencies of his life had been caught up and consumed in the devouring fire of his passion for the girl, and for her eyes, that to him seemed like two pools of living water. Only now he realized that the hitherto drab had become golden. There was something in people’s faces he had not discovered until now. At the back of his mind was an idea. Had he missed something? Was this something within his grasp, or was it merely an

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illusion? Was there some door upon which he had not yet knocked? Was there an existent door upon which he had not hammered with his powerful hands? God! he thought, I've been missing something. He wandered about the dock road in a kind of trance. After eleven o'clock he returned to his room. He did not undress. He just lay on the bed and closed his eyes. The deeper he thought the more he realized this something he had missed. Those laughing brown eyes had bewitched him. He lay for hours and did not sleep. He tossed about the bed. He rose and walked up and down his room. "God!" he exclaimed. And again "God!"

At five o'clock John Muck went down to the cellar and got his broom. Silently he left the house. He went down the street and turned to his left. At the cocoa-rooms he stopped and had his usual large slice of bread and butter. Then he continued on his journey. When he reached the railway station the porter was standing at the door whistling a merry tune.

"Hello, John Muck," he said.

"Good morning," said John, and smiled quite expansively at the porter.

The porter seemed bewildered. He had worked on that station for twelve years. He had never seen John Muck smile. Something must have happened, he told himself. Mr. Muck walked on. When he reached the post office the policeman wished him good morning. He touched his cap and smiled at the officer. When he passed on, the policeman slipped into the station and remarked to his colleagues on duty that "this Muck fellow has gone mad."

And every person whom John Muck passed thought something strange about him. His smile was a kind of flower bewitching everybody. This morning the hand-cart was light, as well as the shovel, and even the broom slid along as though

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run by electricity instead of John's hands. All the people at whom he had smiled had changed. In them he saw one thing. The girl. For each one of them seemed to become the girl with the brown eyes as soon as he looked at them. Now as he brushed outside the station, waiting with beating heart for the shutter to go up, John had a vision. He felt that all around that kiosk the shadows of people were standing, and making strange gestures. He felt they were blocking his path.

But when the shutter suddenly shot up, he saw her. In her first glance something happened to him. The broom fell from his hands. His strength was gone. He felt he could not walk. And all this strength, all this power he was now conscious of seemed to have worked its way up to the eyes. Out of them he spoke, out of them he yearned, and sang, and hoped. The girl placed the shutter against the wall and disappeared. Mr. Muck felt in his pockets, found his tobacco money, and walked straight up to the counter. "Half an ounce of the usual," he asked, and smiled up at her.

"Good morning," she said, and handed him his order. He stood staring at her in a stupid kind of way, until a burly docker elbowed him out of the way with a "Look out, mate. If you haven't any work to go to, I have."

John returned to his brushing, and the girl was lost to him.

"I love her. I love that girl," he repeated again and again, as he swept the streets in the vicinity of the Town Hall, the police-station, the post office and the fire station. An idea occurred to him. In a side street he pulled a piece of paper from his pocket. Then with the stub of a pencil he wrote on it. "I love you! God! I love you. Will you meet me to-night at the corner of Deby Street, just outside Hanrahan's clothes shop?—John Grundy." He placed the note and the pencil in his pocket. When dinner-time came he did not eat,

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but when none of his working mates were looking he strode quietly from the Corporation yard and made his way towards the station. He had the note crushed in his hand. He held it tightly. He stood for a few minutes outside the kiosk, wondering and trembling. He seemed rather like a man going to death than to happiness. He opened his hand suddenly. The paper was all crumpled and moist with sweat; dirty, half torn, the lead writing almost illegible. He walked up and down outside the subway. He watched anxiously the Town Hall clock. At five minutes to one he plucked up courage. He almost ran to the window. Then he pulled up dead. She was not there. He was bewildered. A new girl looked out at him. "Yes, sir. Did you want something?"

"Only a box of matches," he said, and felt the full box in his pocket. Suddenly he straightened himself up, and exclaimed:

"Where's the other girl?"

"She'll be back at two o'clock."

"Give her that," he said, and fled.

The girl laughed and leaned over to see where he had run. But John had already vanished. The girl looked at the note. Smiled, and read it again. John returned to his work. All afternoon he was worried. He was like a man suffering from a strange kind of illness that doctors cannot diagnose. Five minutes after he finished work he was standing by the subway again.

"Oh!" he said again and again. "Oh! If only she'd do something, say something." He walked up and down, his eyes ever focused on the window of the kiosk. In the kiosk the girl was thinking. That afternoon her friend had given her John Muck's note, saying: "Here! this is something for you. A dirty old man left it this afternoon."

The girl read the note. She laughed. In a few minutes she

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forgot all about it. John leaned against the railings of the subway. A boy was playing with a hoop. He called to him. The boy came up. He spoke to him.

“What time does the kiosk close up, sonny?” he asked.

“Seven o’clock.”

John continued to walk up and down. “I’ll wait,” he thought. “I’ll wait here. I’ll chance it.”

At five minutes to seven the girl came outside to close up. Mr. Muck fell into a panic. All his courage seemed to have deserted him. He hid himself behind the cabby’s shelter. From time to time he peeped out. Suddenly he saw her walking in his direction. He crouched down. She walked past. He followed her. She passed out of the subway and turned up the main road. John Muck dogged his way. He felt like a criminal, a murderer, a raper of children, a tramp, a thief. Never in his life had he felt anything like it. Never in his life had he imagined himself any of these things. Suddenly the girl passed down a narrow street. At the eleventh house she stopped, then passed down a flight of steps leading into a kind of cellar. The houses in Howe Street all had cellars. The door closed. John looked up and down the street. Nobody in sight. It was quite dark. A sharp wind was blowing in directly from the river. There was a lamp-light burning in the cellar. Of a sudden the man bent down, peered through the keyhole. He saw a pair of feet walking about. There was the slightest spacing between the bottom of the door and the flooring. John lay flat upon the floor and peeped under this spacing. He lay thus for an hour. He wanted to knock and he didn’t want to knock. He knew he loved this girl, yet he was afraid to reveal it. He could hear the girl now singing as she pottered about the cellar, probably cleaning up, as he thought. He continually murmured: “I love you. Love you! Love you!” Suddenly he heard foot-

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steps. Before he was aware of it a policeman was shining his torch upon him.

“Hello! What you doing there, eh?”

John Muck shivered. He was afraid to look up at the intruder.

“Get to hell out of it,” said the officer.

Without a word John rose to his feet and stood facing the policeman. The light from the torch shone full in his face.

“Well, good heavens!” exclaimed the policeman. “Holy smoke! Hey, John Muck, what’s wrong with you? Have you gone crazy? What’s the matter? Tell me.”

John Muck walked slowly up the steps. He looked the officer straight in the face and said slowly:

“Lord knows. I don’t. Perhaps I’m going balmy.”

“H’m,” said the policeman, and he made way for John to pass.

“Imagine that!” said the officer to himself as he continued on his walk. “John the Muckman of all people. Looking for a piece. Ha! ha! ha!”

John walked straight back to his room. There he sat down in a chair. He felt like a man who has slaved hard all day. The sweat was standing out on his forehead. His whole frame trembled. When he picked up a glass to get a drink of water from the enamel jug the hand shook and the glass fell. “God!” he murmured again and again. “What’s come over me at all?” Again he lay on his bed and tried to sleep. Long after midnight he was still awake. When the rain fell he dozed off like a tired child.

## II

“I don’t know,” thought John when he turned out that morning for work. “I feel somehow as though I had changed

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completely overnight. I might well be Jack Smith or Tom Jones, for I hardly believe I'm John Grundy."

This great change in Mr. Muck became obvious to his various acquaintances whom he passed on his way to work. In the first place the porter applied logic and finally decided that John was wrong in his head. When he passed him a good morning, John walked on as though the porter did not exist. It was the same with the policeman, and a few workers whom he knew by sight. By nine o'clock half the town discovered that something had happened to the famous muckman. That was not all. In the afternoon John was clearing up the yard, his usual job on Fridays, which was pay-day. The inspector, Mr. Tickle, who had always poured praise upon him for his cleanliness, his punctuality, his every quality, in fact, now found cause for complaint. He walked up to John and said to him:

"John! Put your broom down a minute. I want to speak to you."

Mr. Muck looked surprised and meekly followed the inspector to his little office at the end of the shed.

"Do sit down for a minute," he said to John.

John took off his cap, held it tightly in his hand, and sat very lightly on the chair, as though it were made of fluted china and might collapse under him. The inspector sat down opposite him, looked straight into his face and began.

"John," he said. "What's the matter with you? Are you sick?"

Mr. Muck half smiled. "Sick! No, sir. Leastways, I never noticed anything wrong with me." And he thought for a second: "Heavens! Has he guessed something?"

"But you used to be a good worker," continued the inspector. "Tell me now—has something happened lately? Somebody belonging to you dead perhaps?"

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“There’s nothing wrong with me, sir, I swear to you. Besides, I haven’t a single relative living.”

“But you’re neglecting your work,” continued the inspector.

“I? Me, sir? Lord, no. I do my work well. Always have done it well. Oh no, surely, sir, you’re joking with. . . Why, just inspect those five streets I did this morning.”

“I did. You didn’t make a very good job of Merton Street. Now did you? Tell the truth. I’ve been down there this afternoon. I’ll tell you, John Muck, I was beginning to think something was happening to you. I like you, for you are an old hand with us, and you have always had a reputation for good work. I was sorry and anxious for you. Now tell me what’s wrong. If it’s anything private or sacred to your feelings, believe me I’ll say nothing to anybody. Now then, out with it.”

John Muck was trembling all over. He wanted to get his chaotic thoughts into some kind of order. He wanted time to think, to explain away this suspicion of the inspector. For he knew that the policeman would have been talking about him in the station, and eventually it would travel all over the place. But the inspector was speaking again.

“Come, man. Out with it.”

John rose to his feet. A sudden idea occurred to him. He felt it would save him, save explanations, humiliation, everything for him. He looked at the man.

“If you don’t like me any more, sir, I’ll go now. Yes, sir. Right now,” and he made towards the door. But the inspector barred his path.

“That kind of thing won’t do either,” he said. “However, if you won’t tell me, then that’s the end of the matter. But let me tell you this. If I have to complain again, then you can hook it.”

In silence John passed out of the office and returned to his

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work. He was dazed. "Am I on my head or my feet?" he asked himself. "Am I? God! I don't know what's wrong with me." He paused. Then suddenly he exclaimed half aloud: "I love her. I love that girl. That's it. I love her. I love her."

The girl in the kiosk was weighing an ounce of twist for a customer when the latter, who had been looking up the subway, suddenly exclaimed loudly:

"Why, there's your dirty old man."

The girl looked up. She stared at the engineer for a moment, and then picked up the tobacco from the scales and wrapped it up.

"Right you are," she said.

"I say," repeated the customer, "there's your dirty old man."

"My dirty old man? What are you talking about, Matthews?" The customer laughed. Then he leaned across the counter and said slowly:

"Your dirty old man. Sure everybody round these parts knows all about you and him going about the town. Following each other, eyeing each other. Why, only this morning my mate, who has a soft job over at the station, remarked to me that he thought you were hot on him."

"Don't talk so childish," said the girl, and he saw the colour mount to her cheeks. Her hands playing with the scales trembled.

"Oh well," said the customer. "Bye-bye. Don't forget to let us know when the good time is coming. At least you can save me a piece of the cake. I'm going away to-morrow."

"Don't be so damned impudent," she replied, but when she looked up he had already reached the top end of the subway. And now that he had gone and the subway seemed deserted she looked out, and up and down. But she could not see this

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John Muck. Nor did she worry as to his present whereabouts. In fact only the day before she had a feeling that her life was going to be a misery if every time she opened up this man was to be found standing watching and waiting for her, and staring at her. Like a dog. She hated him. And with the realization that she might have to put up with this thing so long as she remained at the present station, she at once made out an application to be transferred to another station.

She was expecting the walking manager some time to-day for an interview. Whilst thinking out what she would say to him that gentleman suddenly appeared round the corner and announced himself in no uncertain manner. He was a big man, bluff, arrogant; a man who had worked his way up from the gutter to his present position.

“Good morning, Miss Pettigrew,” he exclaimed. “What’s all this about your wanting to be transferred to another branch? You know our position at present does not warrant us taking too great a consideration of the desires of our staff. We expect our employees to be satisfied, content. There are always so many people out of work that we can’t afford to waste time listening to pleas for transfers. We only do that in a case where a girl wishes to be near her home. You are near enough to yours anyhow. So to cut the matter short, we can’t entertain the idea at all. But perhaps it wouldn’t be any harm if you explained the reason why you desire this sudden transfer. I had to come down here to-day because I want to warn you that the stock-taking must be started this evening and finished by Thursday.” The inspector did not add that the firm invariably arranged for a stock-taking immediately there was a suspicion of cash short, pilferings of stock, repeat orders, etc., etc. And for a girl to wish to transfer to a kiosk many miles from her home was indeed sufficient grounds for suspicion. Miss Pettigrew had applied for the managership

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of the Edge Hill kiosk, a place lying nearly nine miles from her present post.

“Well?” said the inspector.

The girl looked at the inspector, then down at the floor. Suddenly she said:

“Oh! it’s quite all right, Mr. Short, you need not be afraid that I am short in cash or stock. Oh, no. I’ll tell you everything. For the past month I have been watched, followed, my life has been made a misery by this man. Every morning when I open up he is standing just over there like a dog. He glares at me, smiles at me, makes signs, suggestions. At dinner-time I am afraid to run over to the pub for a jug of hot water even. He walks up and down. At night I tremble when seven o’clock comes and I have to shut up this shop. I have not seen him do it, but I know, I feel that he follows me home. I am afraid of him. I feel sometimes that I’ll wake up to find him in my room. I’m sure there was somebody outside my door the other night. Oh, Mr. Short, can’t you understand why I want to transfer? If I don’t get put somewhere else I know something will happen. The policeman who comes here for his cigarettes told me to take no notice of him, that he was a bit balmy.”

The inspector stared at her. Suddenly he burst out laughing.

“Don’t be foolish, girl,” he said. “Who is this man? And why in heaven’s name did you not take advantage of having a policeman for a customer?”

The girl was silent. Then she said, looking closely at the inspector:

“I’ll tell you the truth,” she began. “Us girls here know things. We have learned. We do not ask anybody for help excepting the firm we work for. If I ask that policeman to do me the favour of chasing this man away he will want

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something in return. They all do. That something I'm not prepared to give. Now do you understand, Mr. Short?"

A half smile played about the inspector's lips. He was just going to say something when he remembered he had a daughter himself just turned eighteen, and Miss Pettigrew, he told himself, could not be seventeen yet.

"Buck up," he said. "Don't be afraid. It's just what he's waiting for. You act differently and he will soon go away. Don't be frightened at all. Walk past him. Snub him. Tell me what his name is, anyway."

"I don't know what his name is," replied the girl. "The men round here call him John Muck."

"John Muck," said the inspector, and burst out laughing again.

"Yes," repeated the girl. "John Muck. Some of the people around here think he's really off his head. He doesn't even speak. Not a word. Only for that it wouldn't be so bad."

The inspector tapped with his pencil upon the glass-topped counter. "Perhaps he's frightened too. He might be a very bashful man."

The girl thought this kind of conversation had gone on long enough. It was enough for a person to state their reasons for wishing to transfer, she thought, without having somebody amuse themselves at your discomfiture.

"Oh, but listen, Mr. Short, I do want to get another place out of this. I simply can't stand that man staring at me morning, noon, and night. Day after day, week after week. Always the same. I tell you again I'm frightened of a night-time. I know he follows me home. I'm sure he does."

"Well," said the inspector, "you'd better apply to Mr. Applegarth. I have nothing to do with the business of the application. As I said before, I merely came down here to warn you stocktaking takes place to-night and ends on

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Thursday. Do you understand? It would suit you much better if you looked after your work and paid no attention to strange men. We repeatedly warn our girls against the same thing. Take no notice of the man. If you were doing your work properly you would not have noticed him at all."

"Not when you have to serve him with tobacco, Mr. Short?"

"Oh, I cannot stand here all day listening to that kind of story. Write to Mr. Applegarth about it. Personally, I advise you to do nothing of the kind. You might find yourself out of a job inside a month. We have plenty of other girls willing to do the work and hold their own against these men. I know that the kiosks are pestered with them, of course, but other girls carry on their work all right."

He suddenly changed the conversation by saying: "How are you off for Bull's-eyes?"

The girl was ready with her answer, proof enough that she was attending to her work, for she said to the inspector: "I could do with a half-gross packet, Mr. Short."

"Very well," he said. "I'll see you get it this evening. Good-day."

Before she could answer him he was gone up the steps on to the station platform, where he caught the first train city-wards. The girl sat down on the wooden stool behind the counter and tried to think out her position. And whilst she was lost in meditation there came a voice to her ears. A voice she told herself she had heard before and recognized. Recognizing it, she did not want to look up; did not want to move. But the voice was repeating again and again: "Half an ounce of twist, please."

Then she looked up and at him. She noticed first of all that he was wearing a new collar and tie, a blue serge suit, and a brown soft hat. He looked so different from the man

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she saw every morning brushing outside the subway. She did not take her eyes off him, nor did he betray the slightest embarrassment himself. They stood looking at each other for a few minutes, then he said, speaking more slowly: "Half an ounce of twist, please." Mechanically she cut and weighed the tobacco. When she handed it to him he spoke again. But this time his voice seemed to change in tone. He said:

"Miss—would you like to come for a walk with me to-night?" And with the utterance of these words John Muck seemed to feel a great weight had been lifted off his shoulders, a great worry from his mind. The girl lowered her head.

"I like you," he continued. "Won't you come some place or other? Honest, I've never loved a girl before, but now you—oh, dear me. Will you?"

She smiled at his apparent simplicity of approach, though she did not raise her head. She could hear him drumming those strong fingers of his upon the counter-top.

"Will you, Miss—" he repeated, and there was an earnestness in his voice that seemed to move the girl, for she suddenly looked up at him, and replied. "I'm awfully sorry, Mr. . . . what is your name?" she asked him.

"My name is John Grundy," he said, "though my mates and the boss I work for call me John Muck. Everybody knows John Muck, but nobody knows John Grundy."

"How funny," she exclaimed, and laughed.

"Will you, then?" he pleaded.

"Not now. Not to-night, Mr. Grundy. Some other time, perhaps."

He stood looking down at her, whilst he squeezed the tobacco in his hand. "All right," he said. "Good night, Miss," and turning on his heel walked slowly up the incline and out of the subway.

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All the way home John Muck had the girl before him. Everywhere he went she was there. Everyone he saw, met, passed the time of day with, all these people would suddenly become the girl with the laughing brown eyes. John Muck's head swam. Half the night he spent walking up and down the floor of his room. For an hour on end he sat on the edge of his bed, planning and dreaming, dreaming and planning. It was early morning before he thought of sleep. When he heard the Town Hall clock strike five he realized it was useless. He washed himself at the basin. Combed his hair. Then he went to the cupboard and took out a piece of bread and butter, and a half-bottle of beer. After this informal breakfast he went down to the cellar for his broom. At twenty minutes past five he left the house. He felt in his pocket, then took out some coppers. He discovered he had enough for his dinner and the usual halfounce of tobacco. John Muck felt he was walking on air. "By God!" he said to himself. "Supposing she says to-night. Supposing? Supposing?"

When he reached the station the porter was in his usual place leaning up against the iron gate. John passed him without a word. But he smiled as he passed. "John Muck's gone winick," thought the porter, returning to his room. "Good morning, John Muck," exclaimed the policeman outside the post office. John smiled but did not reply. When he had gone out of hearing distance the policeman said to himself: "John the Muckman's gone balmy. Nothing else to it." When he reported at the Corporation yard, Mr. Muck noticed one or two things. In the first place one or two work-mates of his passed him without speaking, but he heard a titter behind him and knew it was them. Were they making a joke of him? Did they know anything? A fear arose in his heart. After all, he thought, why should this affair be

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everybody's business? Anger surged in him, for he felt that such a beautiful and sacred thing as love should be the inviolable flower of the individual. Instead he saw all round him, and there could be no mistake about it, a kind of contempt for his person, and not only that, but his workmates and acquaintances seemed to have taken possession of the secret nearest his heart. Why, he asked himself, should his love become a sort of joke, a joke that carried with it a wink and a leer? The inspector called to him as he was leaving the yard with his hand-cart and brush. He turned round to meet the steady and scrutinizing gaze of Mr. Inspector.

"See you make a good job of it this morning, Muck," he exclaimed coldly. John Muck left the yard and pushed the hand-cart towards the railway station. "Oh, what is the matter with me?" he said to himself. "What is the matter with all these people? With everybody and everything? I can't understand." He reached the station and commenced to brush outside the subway. There were few people about, and those workmen catching the early trains. At seven o'clock the kiosk opened up. From time to time John Muck raised his head and with a single glance swept the subway, but as yet there was no sign of the girl. He began to brush again and started to hum a tune to himself. And whilst he brushed, his thoughts were of the girl.

She herself had just left home for her work. She walked slowly, for she had risen far too early. She was thinking. Of one thing only. John Muck. And she was saying to herself: "I like him, yet am afraid of him. I hate him, too." In that moment she visioned him, standing outside the kiosk morning after morning, week after week. He had become a part of the landscape, the atmosphere, a part of the girl herself. She felt him a kind of incubus she could not shake off. When he looked at her she felt herself

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suddenly drained of strength, her thoughts became caught up in a sort of whirlpool. She hated him when she realized it. He made her do silly things, walk the longest way round to her home, the longest way round to her work. The great desire in her was to dodge him. She felt she was parting with something of herself, some secret, some hidden power and beauty. She hated him for this also. Her life was upset. She had tried to get sent to another kiosk so as to be out of his way. No use. Somehow this morning she felt deeply about this street sweeper. It was not that she had learned in some wonderful moment to love him. She only hated him. She felt he was a poison, a wolf, a bore, an abominable nuisance. There was in her an even greater and more violent hate. It was born of her realization that she was helpless in spite of herself, in spite of the knowledge that he was a distraction and a nuisance. It was her utter helplessness to do anything, to say anything. Once she had determined to say to him as she weighed his twist: "Look here, muckman, or whatever you call yourself. I hate you. Why do you stand staring at me morning after morning, following me home night after night? I know all about you. Peeping through the keyhole of my room. I hate you. Hate you. And you think I love you. You? Ha, ha, ha."

But she could not say it. When she looked at him this effort was futile. Now, as she turned the corner and entered the subway from the farthest end, she caught sight of him. For a moment her heart seemed to rush up to her mouth, she experienced a kind of suffocation. She stood at the top of the subway. There was a dead silence. The only sound came from his brushing. At length she walked down to the kiosk and opened up. She arranged her show counter, took a hurried stock, examined her cash drawer. Everything was intact. Five minutes after she had opened up he came. She

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did not deign to notice his arrival, rather seeming to be more occupied with unpacking the new stock of tobacco she had got in the night before. But he spoke to her.

“Good morning, Miss,” he stammered. “Will you give me the usual, please?” And he stood looking down at her, his eyes roaming over her whole person, devouring the something secret and beautiful that was in her. A kind of song he felt in himself. He looked at the soft nape of her neck. At her shoulders, the arms bared to the elbow, to the slight down on her face. He coughed. His own hands rested upon the glass counter. He contrasted them with her own, which were white and slender, with long tapering fingers that now busied themselves with weighing his tobacco. She looked up at him.

“Thank you,” she said quietly, and immediately lowered her head again.

“Thank you, Miss,” he replied. She had never revealed her name to him. He caught her eye and smiled. He stood thus for nearly a minute. Suddenly he could control himself no longer. He burst out beseechingly, pleading, wild, distraught, all the yearning in him again becoming apparent to her through his eyes.

“Miss—Miss——” he said. “Won’t you just come for a walk with me to-night? God!” he exclaimed. “I love you! Truly. Truly.”

He stopped suddenly. The girl’s face had changed. It seemed to have become a mask, behind which she hid all her thoughts. And behind this mask she was lost to him. “Miss—Miss,” he repeated again and again. She looked up.

“Very well,” she said. “Where shall it be?”

John Muck was dumbfounded. The words she uttered were so wonderful that he could not believe himself. The words were a sort of strong wine, dark and luscious; the words were flowers, songs, golden. A miracle. Nothing else. For the

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first time in his life he felt a miracle had really happened. He was so thunderstruck that he could not find a reply for the girl. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. At last he stammered out, and his breathing came sharp, as though in the effort he were yielding up his soul.

“Why, Miss, we could take a walk round by the canal bank. You know the place, don’t you?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Meet me by the turn-bridge at Ford Road, at eight o’clock. Will you now?” He was all urging, all eager. He devoured her with his eyes.

“All right, Mr. Grundy,” she said, smiling at him.

“John Muck’s my name,” he corrected her. “Everybody knows me by that name. Just call me that.”

“All right,” she said.

“You won’t forget?”

“No.”

“Good. Now I must get back to my work again.”

Without another word he ran up the subway. When he reached Merton Street the inspector was waiting for him. That gentleman had a frown upon his face, a frown that enhanced rather than sullied his features. He turned on John.

“Look here!” he began. “What’s this damn game of yours? Pretending to be sick. I know all about you now. And this morning you never brushed near the bridge at all. Don’t talk, don’t make excuses, say nothing. Nothing at all. I know what’s wrong with you. The whole town knows. I’m surprised at you. And a young girl at that. But that’s not the point. You’re neglecting your work. I warned you before about it. Where have you been since half-past seven this morning?

John Muck looked up at the inspector. For a moment he was tongue-tied.

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"I'm sorry, sir," he began. "I didn't know it was that bad. I've always done my work properly. You know that, sir. I can't afford to lose this job. I can't afford to. No. It's no use, sir. I'll admit I'm madly in love with this girl and never loved anybody so much in my life. Solid truth, sir. It's upset me, upset my work, my health. Oh, I know all about it. It's the joke of the whole yard now. Can't you understand, sir?"

He looked pleadingly into the inspector's face. That gentleman never turned a hair, when he said coldly: "Draw your double money on Friday. Meanwhile, you'd better return to your work and do it all over again. Half the people in the town think you're on the beer, the other half think you've gone crazy."

The inspector left him, turned a corner and vanished. John Muck stood stock-still. His whole body seemed to him like a solid block of ice. Not only his body, but his mind. All his thoughts seemed frozen. He stared in the direction the inspector had gone. Suddenly he began muttering half aloud:

"That's done it. Done it. Completely done it."

This sudden catastrophe made him realize all the more that he had loved the girl. Sacked. He continually muttered the word. Sacked. Sacked. He refused to believe it. All for her. And then he remembered that he was to meet her to-night. All his thought turned on her.

"God! I love her and I hate her. I loved her, and what's happened? Everybody laughs. Everybody cuts me dead. I'm ashamed to turn into the yard of a morning. I'm ashamed to look at my pal the porter, the policeman, the post-man. All laughing at me. I'm a real bloody joke all right. And now this fellow."

Even he had only been making a fool of him. Asking him if he were ill; if he had lost any near relations, and all the

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while he knew he was after this girl. His murmuring ceased. He finished his brushing and walked slowly back to the yard. "Another hour," he said to himself, "and I'm free. Free. Away from these jokers, these sly fellows, all laughing up their sleeves at me now. Because I'm sacked. As if the damned inspector hasn't split it all over the yard by now."

He wheeled his hand-cart up to its accustomed place, laid down his shovel, and then stood leaning on his broom. Two men were working at the furnace at the top of the shed. He looked towards them. They seemed to sense his presence, for they both turned round, and one exclaimed loudly:

"Hello, Muck, my boy. How's the old love affair going?"

He heard the other men laugh derisively, and a gust of anger shot up within him, but he kept his peace. The office door at the other end of the yard opened, and the inspector came out. He saw John Muck standing leaning on his broom. He shouted at the top of his voice:

"Hey there, Muck! If I told you to draw double money to-morrow, it doesn't mean that you can stand there doing nothing. Get busy on something. Shake yourself together. You won't be so romantic standing in a dole queue next week."

John started to brush the yard, though only half an hour previously one of the men had cleaned it thoroughly. He worked his way slowly down towards the inspector's office. Suddenly he laid his brush against the wall. Then he walked up to the door and knocked. There was no reply. He knocked again. A voice called out in stentorian tones: "Come in."

John Muck opened the door and entered. The inspector was sitting writing at his desk. He turned round to face the saddest-looking person he had ever beheld in his lifetime.

"Well!" he said. "What do you want now?"

"Did you really mean that, sir?" he asked in almost a whisper.

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"Mean what?" snapped the inspector.

"That about drawing the double money this Friday, sir."

"Of course I meant it. The whole town may be taking you as a joke, but I'm not. Close the door as you go out."

John Muck left the office. His head swam. He leaned up against the wall

"Where'll I get a job now?" he said to himself. "Who'll give me a damn job? 'What are you?' they'll say. 'A muckman?' Then they'll just laugh."

At five o'clock he stole away quietly from the yard. He walked slowly home. His head was bowed upon his breast. A great pain lay beneath his heart. He felt like a man condemned to death, a strange death, where the process of dying was everlasting. He heard people call out to him. He did not speak. He heard some railway porters laugh as he passed the station. He lowered his head still farther. When he reached home he went down to the cellar and put his broom away in the accustomed place. Then he slowly mounted the stairs. He lay down upon his face on the bed, his two hands drawn up to his head. He was numb all over. He wept. He sobbed passionately like a child.

"I loved her! I loved her! Now did I love her? Did I? Oh, my God! And here's the result. Sacked this Friday coming. No work. No work. Nothing. And I loved her!"

There was a strange silence in the room for a few minutes. "One time I was a good muckman. I did my job. I minded my own business. My life was my own. My very own. Now my job's gone. And now—and now—God! my life will be everybody's business. Everybody's."

This thought was a knife thrust deep down into the bosom of his heart, for he felt that this mad passion of the past two months had turned his brain.

"God! God! God!"

## JOHN MUCK

### III

At a quarter to eight Miss Pettigrew arrived at the canal turn-bridge. She stood outside a chemist's shop. She was dressed in a blue serge costume and wore a green beret. She looked anxiously up and down as it drew near eight o'clock. But John Grundy had not yet arrived. In fact he was on his way. All his thoughts were smouldering. The more he realized he loved the girl the more he hated her. He came in sight at last. He saw the solitary girl standing by the chemist's shop. The place around seemed deserted. On seeing him she smiled and the whole of her features lighted up. He smiled. He went up to her.

"Hello," he said. "So you came?"

"Yes, I came."

Whilst he noticed the slightest movement of her lips he remembered that he had been sacked. Whilst he lost himself in the pools of living water which were her eyes, he realized that in a week's time he would not be known, would be without a friend. All his former acquaintances with whom he worked—they would have their laugh. The uppermost thought was his future. Like a flash he saw that this girl had seized him, caught him up in a net-work of passion. In that instant he felt a physical repugnance. A loathing. Yet she was so near to him. "Let's go this way," he said.

They turned to the right and after walking a hundred yards came to a low wall. They stopped. Suddenly she caught his arm. He lifted her gently over the wall and followed himself. They were on the canal bank. All was dark, silent, deserted. From the opposite bank two lamps shone, casting a weird reflection upon the murky waters. They walked along the bank. Stopped. She still held his arm. She turned and faced

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him. In that darkness it seemed as though for the first time she had really known him; known him through the fire in his eyes, the trembling of his lips, his hands, which now rested in her own. They searched each other. The eyes ever seeking and devouring. She spoke.

“Won’t you kiss me?” she asked, and drew nearer to him.

He placed his two hands round her waist. He knew he loved this girl more than any other, yet he could not utter the words. The very words that for months had played upon his heart-strings. He could not speak. He was afraid of her and himself. His life seemed all upside-down. The whirl of his thoughts left him dazed.

“Won’t you kiss me?” she repeated, and the words were beautiful in sound.

He stood looking down at the girl, his arms still clasped tightly about her waist.

“Next week I’ll be John Grundy. Who in heaven’s name ever heard of John Grundy? But I was famous as a muck-man. And now it’s all over. Oh, good God!”

“Won’t you kiss me?” she repeated still again, and in the moment that his head came down and his lips met hers in a kind of blind obeisance, he felt in his very soul as though he were nearer death than life. Something had happened to the girl. He heard her sobbing quietly. Her head rested on his breast. Yet he could do nothing. Something in him was destroyed. And here was the girl of his dreams, desires, and yearnings, his, his for the asking. But he was numb. He could not move. The girl feeling her lips touch his, half swooned in his arms. In that moment she knew she loved him.

“I love you! I love you! I love you!” she murmured again and again. Still the words were beautiful in sound, but they struck no response in his heart.

## JOHN MUCK

"Touch me. Touch me," she pleaded, and all her strength shot into the arms that clasped John Muck tighter and tighter, until he felt he must suffocate. "I love you! I love you! I know your name," she murmured. "I know it. But I love you. Love you!"

*John Muck.* The man felt as though he had been struck by a flash of lightning.

"John Muck?" he muttered. "John Muck?"

Suddenly the girl felt herself squeezed and held as though by a vice, felt his face against her own, felt the sweat standing out upon the man's forehead.

"You know John Muck. He's dead. Dead. *Dead*," he screamed.

*Ugh!* With a sudden terrible oath he flung the girl against the wooden fencing. Then he cleared the wall and ran off into the darkness.

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## A New Competition

First Prize. . £5 5s. od.

Second Prize £3 3s. od.

MESSRS. LOVAT DICKSON have much pleasure in announcing a new short story competition, open to undergraduates of any British university. MSS. shall not exceed 5000 words, and must be submitted not later than July

1st 1935. Each story must be accompanied by a certificate, signed by the competitor's tutor or warden, showing that it is the competitor's original work. The result will be announced in the August number of the magazine.

Messrs. Lovat Dickson reserve the right to print in the Magazine, at a fee of not less than £2. 2s. od., any stories besides the prize-winning stories which seem to them to merit publication.

Competitors shall keep a copy of their MSS. No correspondence can be entered into in regard to the competition, and only those MSS. which are accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope will be returned.

# Blind Man's Buff

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Evelyn Eaton

WE sat, two men in shirtsleeves, outside the door of a peasant hut, in the wildest part of the Maures, those mountains of Provence, so hard to forget, once seen. My neighbour, who owned another peasant hut, fifteen miles away, had "dropped in as he happened by."

"Tell me," I said, suddenly, as the sun disappeared behind an enormous black peak, and we rose to go in, "who is the man with a big red bull."

"In the hills to the left?"

"Yes. I passed him yesterday. He was talking to the bull, and grooming it as though it were a race-horse, crooning away all alone. He didn't answer when I called out to him, only turned his face and stared. . . ."

I shuddered reminiscently, remembering how I had quickened my pace when I met that stare. There was something about it. . . .

"It struck me as odd that a man should croon to a great big snorting monster of a bull, and pay no attention to a fellow-man passing. There can't be so many passers-by up there."

"He's blind; that's why."

## BLIND MAN'S BUFF

“Blind! With a bull. . . .”

“He’s got reason to love that bull.” My neighbour paused for a moment. Then he looked me straight in the face. “I’ll tell you something,” he said. “You’re a stranger here, and it can’t do any harm.”

“When André Leroy lost his sight in the war, he lost everything, so we thought in the village here, and we pitied him. Ever since he was seven or eight, he wanted to be, not only a farmer, but a stock-breeder, and especially a breeder of bulls. He was herdsboy at ten, and herdsman when the war took him, to fling him out again, at twenty, blinded and done for.

“André’s people were farmers, specializing in olive oil. There were no substitutes, in those days; oil sold well. André’s father had a bit put by. His mother was dead, and that was a blessing, before she had to see her son, helpless and stumbling, with that tragic look about his face.

“They talked it over, and he went away to an institution, where they teach what they can to the blind, reading, and writing, and so on. But the old man never got over it. He was silent and ailing from then on. He did his work—the institution was expensive—and he sent the money regularly, but he never mentioned André, and we got out of the habit of asking . . . it didn’t seem decent. Bit by bit he was forgotten, till after ten years, old Leroy died, and he came back.

“‘You’ll sell the place, I suppose?’ we said, but he just stood there, smiling, looking straight through you with those staring eyes, and ‘No,’ he said, ‘why should I sell? It’s good land—for breeding.’

“‘Ah, you’ll stock, and put in someone to manage?’

“‘I’ll stock and manage it myself,’ he answered, and so he did.

“I don’t know what that institution taught, but if all the pupils came out like André . . . ! Man, he could write as well

## EVELYN EATON

as you or me, and read from his Braille books, and tell the time from a special watch he had, and light a cigarette, and dress himself, and go about without a dog or stick . . . but the miracle was in the way he handled men and beasts.

“I’ve seen him drinking wine—and he always knew what he was drinking, too; you couldn’t fool him with an inferior kind of wine, not André! At the first taste of something strange, he knew—with the foreman of the Co-operative, who bought his straw and fodder, and afterwards go out in the yard, and, just by touching the load, yell out: ‘You’re cheating me! Throw off two sacks, or pay for them! Ah, you thought while I was drinking in there you’d get away with it, eh?’ and the two men on the lorry took and threw those sacks off, quick, without any argument . . . there was something in his stare . . . you’ve seen it yourself.

“With beasts . . . he looked after his bulls himself, with the help of a little herd he had for training. We all told him, in chorus, time and again, that he’d be killed. He only smiled. Then he’d demonstrate . . . go in and talk to a ramping black bull he had before this red one. When it charged, head down, he’d wait till it nearly touched, then slip aside. He’d slip all round the pen, and slip himself out. Sometimes he used a cloak, like a toreador, but mostly not. He must have smelt every move of the bull, for he always knew. It was uncanny. We used to watch him, breathless. But it wasn’t a thing I liked to see, him blind in front of a bull, and after a while I gave up going, except when I had to take up a cow. His stock was the best in all the hills, black or red. He got the red bull after. It was the same with this as the other. He groomed it himself, and seemed to set great store by it. I used to hear tales . . . how for a bet he did this, and how for a joke he dared that. But I never went up to see, until he got married.

“He married a girl from Grasse, and all the village was

## BLIND MAN'S BUFF

curious. I was among the first to catch sight of her . . . a beauty. Yes, a beauty. We hadn't a girl to touch her, in the village. And all of that to a blind man! There were some who murmured, and others who tried their hands at seduction . . . but never twice! He knew what one was at, before one began. It took a brave man to outface that stare, at André's own table, drinking André's wine. Most of them gave it up . . . all except a chemist, an outsider, a man from the towns. He had the place next André, growing plants and herbs, all up the mountainside. Then he bottled them, and sold them in his shop in Cannes.

"And because he was a neighbour, he dropped in, often, and, because he was a townsman, and an outsider, he wasn't afraid of André . . . he saw him only as a poor blind thing, clever with bulls, with a wife too good for him. He pleased Francine, for he took to calling her that, instead of Mrs. Leroy.

"After awhile, whenever one happened up, André would be out with the bulls, and Francine would be giving the chemist wine, or coffee, or menthe, or simply sitting with him in the little room she had fixed for a sitting-room, as they do in the towns. It seemed she set as much store by her chemist as André did by his red bull. And people began to make rude remarks, and talk of a blind man's horns, and so on.

"But the chemist went on coming. And the only difference was that André came in now and sat with them sometimes. I've found him there. And I was there when Francine complained of headaches, and André said, as though he were thinking of something else, 'Why don't you get Guillard'—that was the chemist—'to make you up a powder, or something? What's the use of having a chemist as a neighbour, if he can't take a headache away?'

"Guillard laughed, and said he would. He rolled up a powder, then and there, from a little case he had. Francine

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took it, and after that she used to take it regularly whenever she had a headache, or felt ill, which she often did. She came from the towns. It stands to reason that life on a bull-farm didn't agree with her.

"She used to talk with the chemist about wanting to go back. He fell in love with her . . . heavily, desperately in love. It was easy to see what was wrong with the man. Easy, that is, for anyone but a blind man. The village saw. And tongues were wagging; would Francine go with him? It wasn't so easy to see into her. One thing was certain, Guillard wouldn't be going about looking like that if she had encouraged him much, now would he? And yet . . .

"I found them one night at supper. André had asked the chemist to stay on. The three were sitting there, talking gaily enough, but the atmosphere was strained, and there was something tragic in the air. I found myself unwilling to go, although it was late. . . . I had a feeling that someone needed my protection . . . a silly sort of feeling to have, and naturally, I forced myself to throw it aside. André went with me to the door. Francine followed. There was a tense expression in her face. She took André's arm, and kept him with us, talking for a moment. Then she turned and ran back.

"It was a fine night. André seemed in no hurry to leave me. We passed the pen with the bulls. The red one was alone, worrying a heap of straw in a corner. He turned as we passed, and snorted, lowering his head. He looked pretty formidable, and once again I said to André:

"'That bull will get you one day, if you don't look out. Why don't you get a man to help you? You can afford it.'

"André grinned, that rather dreadful, mirthless smile of his, and said: 'Whoever the bull kills, it won't be me. Look out for your own skin, if you're afraid.'

"'It isn't that . . .'

## BLIND MAN'S BUFF

“ ‘I know,’ he said, ‘I know. You’re a good man, and I dare-say a good friend. *You* wouldn’t put drugs in a blind man’s drink, nor try to elope with his wife, now, would you?’

“ Before I could answer, he was gone, and when I saw him again, it wasn’t a moment to ask for explanations.

“ Early that next morning, a shepherd, passing, heard cries for help coming from André’s place. He left his dog with the flock, and ran to see. And there was André, in a corner of the bull-pen, badly hurt, and there was the bull, trampling and worrying something by the fence. The something turned out to be the chemist, done for.

“ This was André’s tale, when they had got him out of there, and were making him comfortable.

“ He had gone to see to the bull, as usual before turning in, when the animal, more savage than ever—he called *me* as witness to that—came at him. His foot slipped, and he went down, screaming for help. The chemist, who was on his way home—one or two people looked at each other and would have smiled over that if the poor fellow weren’t so shockingly dead—the chemist, hearing his shout, ran in most pluckily to help. The bull turned from André to the stranger. André crawled into a corner behind some sacking, and, being blind, had only heard the rest. He had shouted, and shouted, but . . .

“ There was a silence.

“ ‘Where was Mrs. Leroy?’ somebody asked.

“ Francine had taken her headache powder, as usual, André explained. They went to see, and found her sleeping heavily. She was very hard to wake, and seemed quite dazed when the accident was explained to her.

“ Well, of course, there was an inquest, and a verdict of accidental death, and strangest of all, the chemist turned out to have a wife, or a widow, rather, who came up from the towns. No one knew what Francine thought about *that*. A few months

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later André sent her on a visit to her mother. She's been there ever since. But all the talk about a blind man's horns is over. The bull's horns saw to that."

"And that's why he loves it so?"

"Partly." My neighbour hesitated, then he went on with a rush. "Suppose that night I happened to go back, not feeling easy? What might I have seen? Perhaps . . ." he lowered his voice to a straining whisper. I looked about me nervously . . . the little peasant kitchen seemed full of grey shadows from the grim night outside . . . "perhaps a blind man playing a bull, like a toreador, playing it and playing it, with a man's coat, nearer and nearer to where *it* lay . . . a human bundle, perfectly inert, drugged, doped with the stuff in a blind man's drink that André talked about. Suppose that I saw the bull get André, the last time, as he twisted, and heard him catch his breath and sob, and fling the coat over the other, in a last effort, and the bull stop, and smell, and stamp on . . . that . . . while André crawled away?"

"But that would be murder!"

"Monsieur, I am giving you a simple supposition . . . what someone leaning on the fence of the bull-pen, flooded by moonlight, might have seen that night." He paused a moment. Then he raised his head and looked at me. "Suppose it *not* conjecture, but the truth? What then? There is a justice not of the courts. André is blind. It's a mean sort of devil who would steal a blind man's wife, when he has a woman of his own. Moreover I have a young wife myself, and," he added significantly, "no red bull. But I don't go up there, to Leroy's farm any more."

# End Pages

## COMPETITION RESULTS

We are able to announce this month the result of two of our competitions: the entries were more difficult to judge so we had to hold over the announcement of the winner of the January best story until now. The name of the winner for the January competition is

### HESSE TROY

for a story called

*The Revenge of Tia Juana*

while

### G. PENDLE

is highly commended for his contribution

*A Spartan Wife*

The winner of the February competition was not as difficult to decide upon as was the January.

### P. W. RADICE

was the best with an Indian story called

*Set Piece*

### *Soap Flakes*

is the title of the contribution which we highly commend. This is by

### L. ASHER

The winners in both competitions will each receive two guineas by the 1st of April.

The general level of the stories submitted for both these competitions was most promising, though some of their authors are apt to forget that a short story

should be revised and pruned and must not be allowed to get out of hand. Like everything else there *are* rules which have to be followed though they often consist of 'Don't's' rather than 'Do's'.

In another number we invited readers to send in stories to a pattern which we supplied—may we repeat ourselves and give the ingredients once again.

"Three characters are given and a situation in which they are involved. That situation may be transformed into a story depending for its interest on the conjunction of events (you are at liberty to introduce what events you like); or into one depending for its effect upon the depiction of emotions. Write the story in whatever way you think it would be most effective, and submit it to us not later than December 31st. Its length should not exceed 2,500 words; its title you must supply.

"A prize of £2 2s. od. is offered for the best submitted.

"*The Characters*: David Grey, a young married man of about twenty-six years of age.

"Janet Grey, his wife.

"Thaddeus Kershaw, an elderly mysogynist bachelor, uncle to Janet Grey, and from whom Janet has expectations.

"*The Situation*: David Grey is employed by a large department store as a clerk at £4 per

## END PAGES

week. On Christmas Eve he is given notice that after the holidays his services will no longer be required."

The two guineas goes to

**ANGELA SEYMORE**

and her title is

*Sunshine in February*

Many competitors found the situation rather a difficult one for they were unable to develop it in a fresh and unusual way.

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS

EVELYN EATON is a Canadian, born in Switzerland, educated in England, living in France, married to a citizen of the Free State of Danzig, divorced, and after years of travel and work, settled (for the moment) in a peasant hut—*bastidon*—in the Maures.

She has written several books, starting with poetry, and evolving through novels and short stories to her present preoccupation—plays.

Her first novel *Desire, Spanish Version* was about her experiences for eighteen months in a film studio, as under-dog-of-all work, in the scenario department and on the set, with every sort of foreign nationality.

She likes a home and a horse.

MICHAEL FESSIER is twenty-nine years old. He was born in California, has done some semi-professional boxing and baseball and says he was "distinctly mediocre at both." His home is at Sausalito, and he is editor of the *San Rafael Independent*. He is a regular contributor to *Esquire*.

VENNETTE HERRON's story can, we think, be described as a *Fugue for Lovers*. She is a mys-

terious person whom we do not know anything about.

DR. A. J. CRONIN needs no more account than he has given us in his article. Since the smashing success of his first book, he has published two more, and his latest, *The Stars Look Down*, will be out by the time these lines appear. His short stories and articles are much sought after by the magazines and we are very fortunate to secure his contribution to this issue.

V. S. PRITCHETT who contributes a lively article on L. A. G. Strong, writes in the *Spectator* and the *Listener*. Besides being a writer and critic of some note he is also interested in sailing; Spain and its people are well known to him and he has written a book of travel in that country.

JAMES HANLEY was born in Dublin thirty-four years ago and has been in his time a journalist, a seaman, and on the railway. The present story must be the result of his observations while on the railway.

LAURENCE HOUSMAN scarcely needs any word from us: he has been writing for over forty years so our readers will know the author by his works; his home is in Somerset not far from Glastonbury.